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THE BIBLE—WHAT IT IS AND IS NOT

THE BIBLE

WHAT IT IS AND IS NOT

BY

JOSEPH WOOD

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Main

I

THE GREAT BIBLES OF THE WORLD

FEW things are more important to the progress of a reasonable religion than right views about the Bible. Foolish claims are made for the Bible which it does not make for itself. It nowhere claims to be an infallible book; it does not assert what many of its ignorant admirers assert, that every chapter, every verse, every word, is verbally inspired. These claims have done it great injury, because many men having come to see that they cannot be sustained, have jumped to the equally false conclusion that none of the claims of the Bible on our reverence are worthy of attention. The Bible has been wounded in the house of its friends. I believe if right views about the Bible prevailed, and if the truth about the Bible were generally known, scepticism would be robbed of many of its favourite arguments and mockeries. It is because good men go on contending for theories about the Bible which will no longer

hold water that it is possible for scepticism to go on throwing ridicule upon the Bible. Half the sneers, and more than half the arguments against the Bible heard in our secular halls proceed upon the ground that Christians claim the Bible to be infallible. Once let it be known that Christians study the Bible as they do any other great book ; that they believe in its human origin ; that they know it to contain mistakes ; that they value it not for its myths and miracles but for its moral and spiritual records and teaching, and the sceptic will be robbed of half his weapons. More than that, the intellect and conscience of many a good man would be immensely relieved if only he felt he might read the Bible in a reasonable way, and were not bound to believe that it teaches science, or is never mistaken in its histories, figures, dates, or even precepts.

What I wish to bring home to you in these lectures is the real and priceless value of the Bible. But it is folly to think that to get people to value the Bible we must hide the truth about it. Every scholar, every minister of religion, now knows that the Bible is not free from taint of human error ; but there are many who seem to think that this can be kept from the people, and that it is unwise to let everybody know it.

What a miserable faith in religion we must have if we think it can ever be injured by the

knowledge of truth! On what a very sandy and insecure foundation Christianity must rest if, in order to preserve it as a temple for ourselves and our children, we must cry 'Hush!' when it is proposed to tell people the simple, exact, ascertained facts about the Bible. Besides, it is perfectly useless to try and keep them from the common people. They leak out in newspapers; they are the subject of articles in cheap and popular magazines; they turn up in social discussion; and if Christian teachers fail to present them to the public, they get presented with a highly unfavourable bias by secularist writers. Why should we fear to discover and make known the truth about the Bible or about anything else? It has been gravely urged that the results of modern Biblical criticism should only be published in the Latin language, so that the minds of ordinary people should not be disturbed by that which is the peculiar preserve of scholars. Let us have done with such moral cowardice. As Bishop Butler said, '*Things are what they are, and the results will be what they will be.*' Why, then, should we try to make believe otherwise? Yet when a preacher tries to show the people the truth about the Bible; tells them honestly that the science of the Bible is incorrect; that the morality of the Pentateuch is defective; that no scholar believes Paul to have written the Epistle

to the Hebrews; that the numbers in Exodus are grossly exaggerated; many people are alarmed, as if, when we begin to remove the dirt from an old master, we were going to destroy the glorious picture itself. But we remove the dirt with which it has become encrusted that the picture may be more clearly seen and better appreciated than before. So if we apply an honest and searching criticism to the Bible we shall clear away many errors and mistakes that have hitherto obscured much of its teaching, and the truth of God that is in it will shine out more purely and clearly than ever.

'Oh,' but it is said, 'you must not unsettle men's minds; the old views do no harm, and it is not safe to set men questioning.' On the contrary, I believe in provoking men to ask questions, and I do not believe that the old views do no harm. To believe that the Bible is miraculously inspired and the infallible word of God, if it be not so, is not an innocent belief, a harmless faith. It is something that stands in the way of religious progress, more than anything else of which we can conceive. And as to unsettling men's minds about the Bible, that mischief, if it be a mischief, is already done. Reasonable opinions about the Bible are in the air; they are like floating seeds, you cannot control their flight. Shut them out at the front

door, and they will float in at the window ; sweep them from your dwelling, and they will spring up in your garden. And if you let the people go on believing a lie, the people will find you out in a few years ; and then where will your religious influence be ? Be not afraid. The truth about the Bible must be good for religion and not ill. Do not be afraid of these reasonable views, and remember how much you injure the Bible by claiming for it what it does not claim for itself. You do not add to the value of a loaf of bread by declaring that it will quench thirst ; you do not increase the pleasure you receive from a rose in June by asserting that its scent will cure a bad toothache ; you do not draw out the true meaning of a great picture or a beautiful landscape by ascribing to it a didactic purpose ; and you do not enhance the Bible by making for it unfounded claims, or strengthen its hold on the human heart by wrong assumptions as to its origin and character.

It is one of the results of the widening knowledge of the last hundred years that nations, races, and religions know a deal more of each other than at any previous time in the world's history. When nations lived without much communication, it was possible for each to think that it was the race specially favoured of heaven, and that its religion contained the whole truth of God. But this faith is shaken when we come

to know our neighbours better. The Mohammedans have the profoundest belief in the Koran as the only Bible for man. You know the story of the Mohammedan caliph at the burning of the great library of Alexandria. '*If these books agree with the Koran, we do not need them; if not, they are false. So in any case let them be destroyed.*' The Buddhists have the same reverence for Buddha and for their sacred books that we have for Jesus Christ and the Bible. It is now seen that each nation has been guided by God, and that no part of the world has been left without light from heaven. There have been inspired men in all great races since the world began. Each nation has received a fragment of truth. Each nation has made the mistake of supposing its fragment to be the one and only divine and complete system of religion. It has written its Bible, and supposed that here was the closed book of the revelation of God, and the final deposit of Eternal Truth. Now, this belief could easily be held by any nation so long as it was isolated, so long as the nations knew very little of each other. It is only within the last century that many of the great systems of ancient and eastern religion have been opened up to the life and thought of the modern western world.

But just as we have learned that Europeans are not the only civilized peoples—that in Japan,

for instance, a noble civilization and a noble art existed long before ours—so we have learned that the religions of the great races are not all false while ours is the only true, but that there is much that is akin to our religion in many other lands. We have learned that our experience has not been unique. We have learned that other peoples have passed through similar phases of growth and have arrived at similar conclusions; that they have discovered similar truths concerning God and man, similar principles of right and wrong. We have learned that they have Bibles of their own which they think came by special inspiration and are infallible just as we think ours, and that they have set themselves up as exclusive possessors of truth as we have done. Do not mistake me. I am not putting these other religions and Bibles on the same level as Christianity and the New Testament. In all nations there have been true prophets inspired of God; but in no other nation have they been so conspicuous or reached such a high level of inspiration as among the Jews. To take the analogous case of art: we know that all the great nations have developed artistic powers; yet I do not hesitate to say that in one race especially has the artistic faculty been so prominent as to make it an authority on art for all the rest. As Greece was specially

endowed with the artistic nature, so the Jews were specially endowed with the religious nature. For while the science of Comparative Religion has shown that there are half a dozen Bibles in the world, each containing much that is beautiful and true, it has also shown the immense superiority of the Christian over all other sacred scriptures. Other Bibles may contain isolated sentences of equal or greater significance, but they have no such average beauty and value. In admitting the inspiration of other prophets besides the Jewish, and of other Bibles than ours, I am not detracting from ours. I do not detract from the Alps by calling Snowdon a mountain. I do not dim the glory of the rose by calling the marsh-marigold a flower. I do not narrow the Thames by calling the Tamar a river. No, nor any more will the supreme spiritual inspiration of the Jewish prophets suffer depreciation through a frank acknowledgment of a true, although inferior, inspiration elsewhere.

What are the great Bibles of the world? They are six in number:—

1.—The Vedas of the Brahmins.
2.—The Zend-Avesta of the Parsees or Persians.
3.—The Tripitika of the Buddhists.
4.—The Chinese Sacred Books.
5.—The Mohammedan Koran.
6.—The Jewish and Christian Scriptures.

There are other sacred books in the world, but these are the most important. Every one of these Bibles would be an interesting subject for a lecture. We must now be content with a few words about each.

1. The Vedas of the Brahmins are the sacred books of Hinduism. They include various collections of hymns chanted at religious services and sacrifices, and Prof. Max Müller tells us that they date from 1200 B.C. The Vedas are a vast national literature like our own Bible, but much larger. Like our own Bible they contain myths and miracles, psalms and prophetic utterances. We must remember that 120 millions of mankind reverence these Vedas as the word of God, and the Brahmins believe them to be so entirely the inspiration of God as to have existed in his mind before time began. 'Vedas' means knowledge, wisdom.

2. Zend-Avesta, the sacred books of the Parsees, are ascribed to Zoroaster, the founder of the Parsee religion. He lived and taught more than 3000 years ago, and some of the noblest men in ancient history—Cyrus and Darius for instance—were his disciples. Zend-Avesta means 'scripture,' and the book was probably gathered together by Zoroaster from ancient traditions, myths, and hymns, to which he added many precepts of his own. It is not

easy to over-estimate the importance of the Zend-Avesta as a guide to one of the noblest and purest of the ancient faiths. The Persians were worshippers of one god only. They declared the unity and indivisibility of the Divinity. The disciple is taught to be pure in thought and word and deed; to be temperate, chaste, and truthful, and to do all that will increase the welfare of mankind. Men are not to cringe before the powers of darkness or crouch before a tyrant; they are to meet them upstanding and confound them by unending opposition and the charm of a holy life. It was the Persians who first clearly taught the immortality of the soul, a doctrine which did not appear among the Jews until they came into contact with Persian thought.

3. The Tripitika of the Buddhists is the Bible of a religion which numbers more followers than any other faith in the world. It is an offshoot from the ancient Hindu religion, and was founded by Buddha, a man of princely birth, who appeared 628 B.C. He is sometimes called Gautama, and sometimes Sakyamuni. For a beautiful picture of this noble man, likest to Christ of all ancient teachers, I advise you to read Mr. Rhys David's little book on Buddhism, and Edwin Arnold's great poem, 'The Light of Asia.' The Buddhist scriptures are called the

'Tripitika,' or 'three baskets,' being in three parts. The first 'pitika,' or basket, contains rules of discipline; the second, the discourses of Buddha; and the third treats of philosophy and the subtle mysteries of religion. The words of Buddha, handed on from age to age, and preserved at first solely in men's memories, were at last set down in writing. Much is in the Tripitika which Buddha never uttered; but they are regarded as we regard our Bible. Buddhism was the state religion in India for nine centuries; it is one of the religions of China; it is the religion of Tibet, of Japan and Ceylon; and the Tripitika, like the Bible, has been freely translated out of the original into many of the languages of the east. With its commentaries, it forms an immense literature, five or six times as large as our Bible. The central idea of Buddhism is the salvation of the soul from evil, and from the changes of life by contemplation of truth and goodness, and finally by absorption of the individual in universal Being.

4. The Chinese Sacred Books. 'The Five Kings' and 'The Four Shoo,' consist of ancient hymns, myths, etc., brought together by Confucius and enlarged by his own discourses. This great soul, who was reviled in life, but whose influence now sways the hundreds of millions of China,

was born 531 B.C., a few years before the death of Buddha. The sacred books he edited are called 'Kings,' *the warp threads of a web.* The name signifies that which is woven together, like the use of our word 'text,' from the Latin '*textum*'—that which is woven. These books teach that there is one supreme Being everywhere present, all-seeing, who commands pure thoughts, right deeds, and watchfulness of tongue. They teach a reverence for the past which in many respects is slavish; but they also teach a duty to the present which makes the Chinese one of the most orderly and law-abiding people on the earth.

5. The Koran, the Bible of Islam, is the work of Mohammed, and consists of extracts and stories from the Jewish Scriptures, together with a large number of Eastern legends, and Mohammed's own dreams and sayings. 'Islam'—'the righteous man'—is the youngest of the great religions of the world; and hence we are able to see how its first simple teaching became overlaid with myths and foolish superstitions. For example, although Mohammed came into the world like other children, wonderful things were said to have taken place at his birth: one legend relating that the angels took him from the arms of his nurse, drew his heart from his bosom, and then squeezed from it the black drop of

original sin which is in every child of Adam. He was born 571 years after Christ, and rose from a camel-driver to be one of the greatest forces of the world. He preached for forty years the great truth 'La Ellah Ellah'—'there is no god but God.' That God is one, and not three, is the great doctrine of the Koran; and next in order is taught submission to God's will. Koran means 'the reading.'

I have no time to show you the many points of likeness to be found in these various Bibles; how they all abound in stories of miracles; how they teach the same rites and sacrifices; how the ideas of immaculate conceptions and virgin mothers are common to other religions and Bibles as well as our own; how the Messianic idea, too, is found in the Vedas and in the Chinese Scriptures; how even the same ceremonies are enjoined, so that when the first Christian missionaries went among the Buddhists, they were surprised to find a religion so much resembling their own in its rites and ceremonies, even to the shaven crown of the priest and use of a rosary, and they could only account for the resemblance by supposing that the devil had forestalled God by coming there ahead of him and setting up a counterfeit as much like Christianity as possible. But I might show you more. I might show profounder resemblances: how all teach purity,

mercifulness, justice, contempt of riches, humility; so that neither faith, nor love, nor truth, nor disinterestedness, nor forgiveness of injuries, nor patience, nor prayer, nor the sentiment of brotherhood is monopolized by any form of faith. They are taught in all the great Bibles of the world.

I do not say they are taught as nobly and clearly as in our own. I am not claiming that all the great Bibles of the world stand on the same level; or that their teachings are identical. Mingled with much that is true and beautiful, these Bibles have much in them that is degrading, foolish, and superstitious. What I affirm is simply this: that from the furthest east to the remotest western horizon, God, by whatever name he has been called, has been present with his kindling light, and that in many races outside the Jewish pale he has raised up true prophets for himself, who have spoken such words of grace and truth that they have greatly moved the hearts of men, have been the power of God unto better things, have been carefully remembered by grateful disciples, and finally enshrined in sacred books. This fact is the basis of the great and modern science of Comparative Religion. Every one of these sacred books has an admixture of earthy matter; every one contains gleams of heavenly wisdom; every one has helped to purify

the great stream of human life as it flows down to the sea.

Children of men! the unseen Power, whose eye
For ever doth accompany mankind,
Hath looken on no religion scornfully
That ever man did find.

Which has not taught weak wills how much they can?
Which has not fall'n on the dry heart like rain?
Which has not cried to sunk, self-weary man:
Thou must be born again?

These various religions will not acknowledge each other; each claims to have a monopoly of God and truth; each has denied that religion could have any fountains beyond its own saints and prophets. But whatever has been of vital power in each—and they would not have lasted so long had they been wholly false—has come from the same source, the inspiration of the Almighty. God is now seen to have been, not the God of a tribe, a nation, or a church, but the God of the whole earth; and although one people possessed the God-consciousness in striking superiority to all the rest, so that by their special endowment blessing might flow to all mankind, yet in every nation he that feared God and worked righteousness hath been accepted of him.

All souls that struggle and aspire,
All hearts of prayer by thee are lit;
And, dim or clear, thy tongues of fire
On dusky tribes and centuries sit.

II

THE AUTHORIZED VERSION

We have seen that the Bible does not stand alone, but is one of a distinct class of books called the sacred books of the world. All the foremost religions of mankind have had sacred books which have been regarded with the same feelings of veneration that our own Bible inspires among us. This is not for one moment to say that one Bible is as good as another, or that all stand on one level. Snowdon is a mountain and the Matterhorn is a mountain, but one is immeasurably loftier than the other. And the Bibles of the world differ in their value to the human race, differ in the nobility and inspiration to which they rise. Our own Bible is easily first, although perhaps not for the reasons generally assigned. Its superior divinity has for the most part engrossed the zeal of its defenders. But what I care for most is its superior humanity.

Shakespeare is not a whit more human. What an insight it has into the human heart! How it reveals to us the secret places of the human mind, and so reveals to us ourselves! How, as it unfolds the great drama of humanity, are we shown that God is the educator of man! Human life, as depicted in the Bible, is largely typical. Men lived boldly from within, and what they said and did had that broad human significance which forecasted what men would say and do to the end of time. How true to human nature is that mixture of good and evil we find in its heroes! Popular theology would have us think of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David as almost perfect in character, quite beyond anything which we see in our day. Popular scepticism flies to the other extreme, and can speak only of the deceitfulness of Jacob, and the adultery of David, asking with a sneer, 'What sort of a God is he when these are called men after his own heart?' Both are wrong. These men were by no means perfect, and the Bible never speaks of them in that way. They were terribly imperfect; they fell, they were punished, and they carried the penalty of wrongdoing with them to their graves. But this is their glory: that they knew they were imperfect, and were not content; they lifted themselves above the average morality of their day; they made

strenuous efforts after something nobler; they were led on by God to higher levels than men had yet attained; they were men who, in spite of their sins, still clung to the sense of God. The good that was in them was marred and debased by the alloy of selfish, base, and cruel elements; and we are shown, as we are shown nowhere else, these two struggling with each other, the victory sometimes to the evil and sometimes to the good, yet on the whole, in the long run, the good prevailing. It is our own deceit we read in the story of Jacob; it is our own shame and repentance we hear in the bitter cries of David. These men are not wax figures on which moral maxims are hung like suits of clothes made to the pattern we require. They are warm, living, human souls in whom we find our own experience. We see how Jacob's treachery found him out and was paid back in kind, and accompanied him, a dark shadow upon his life, all the days of his pilgrimage; and we know from our own lives that we can never escape the consequences of any of our deeds. We listen to Job arraigning and challenging God, and we think we hear our own hearts speak in passionate trial. We hear Nathan saying unto David, '*Thou art the man*,' and we know that Nathan stands just for our own accusing conscience. Whether the Bible be a divine book or not, it is certainly the greatest

book of the human heart and of human life ever written.

It is the distinction of the Bible to be the sacred book of two great religions, the Jewish and the Christian. Consider what the Old Testament has been to the Jewish people—a nation without a country now for eighteen centuries—in all their homeless wanderings. It was their consolation through a thousand years of Christian persecution. Consider, too, what the Bible has been to Protestant Christians, the charter of their freedom from the jurisdiction of the Pope; an armoury of weapons against idolatry and priestly domination; to French Huguenots and Scotch Covenanters and English Puritans, a nurse of heroes, teaching them many a song of battle, many a hope of final victory.

Surely such a book, with such a history, and such a fame, and such intrinsic value, merits the most careful consideration. It has been before the world so long—its youngest chapters 1700 years—and has been so much read and studied, that it would seem as if it ought to have been fairly comprehended long ago. But please remember that until the Protestant Reformation the Bible was hidden from the common people in the priestly ark of an unspoken language. The common people have only been in possession of the Bible about four centuries. A little farther

back the New Testament was assailed by monks and priests as an invention of the devil; and even the scholarship which hung over the Bible before Erasmus was superstitious and uncritical to the last degree. Since then there has been a steady progress in the direction of a more scientific comprehension of its character; and through the labours of a host of great and laborious scholars we are now in a better position to judge of the Bible, to separate the legendary from the historical, and the true from the erroneous, the gold from the rubble, than were even those who lived when its parts were first brought together into one book. And yet, so far as I can judge, the new criticism has made but very little impression upon the popular estimate of the Bible and the uses to which it is put. Even ministers who are acquainted with the new criticism, and substantially accept it, go on using the Bible as if nothing had happened, when something has happened of fundamental interest and importance. As for the average disciple in our Protestant communities, the Bible is for him what it was for his fathers. It is one book. Its parts are all of equal value. A text here is as good as a text there or anywhere else; Old Testament as edifying as New; the Book of Judges on the same level as the Epistle to the Philippians; words taken out of their connexion

made to mean exactly the opposite of what was in the writer's mind; the minutiæ of Christian theology found in or read into the obscurities of Hebrew history. Dr. J. Mason Neale, the well-known hymn writer, has published a sermon on the text, '*Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of thy soul to come down.*'[1] The literal sense of the passage, a petition of the Ziphites to Saul to come down that they may deliver David into his hand, is nowhere mentioned. It is applied to Christ's coming down, first in his incarnation '*from the crown of celestial majesty to the diadem of thorns*,' and secondly to his coming down in the Eucharist at the call of the priest! Such a method of interpreting Scripture is both fanciful and frivolous. Or, take the words '*Touch not, taste not*,'[2] which are constantly quoted on temperance platforms as though they were an Apostolic injunction not even to hand to a neighbour a glass of wine. But these words are a popular saying of the ascetics which Paul quotes only to condemn. He reproaches those who are subject to such rules and ordinances. The text is made to mean exactly the contrary of what the Apostle taught. These are only two instances of the misuse of the Bible out of thousands that might be given.

[1] Sam. xxiii. 20. [2] Col. ii. 21.

What then have we in our Authorized Version of the Bible? First notice the title. The Bible, that is to say, *The* Book. But this title is a very modern one. It is only within recent centuries it has gone by this name—'the book' in the singular number. Five hundred years ago the Bible was not called '*Ton Biblion*,' the book, but '*Ta Biblia*,' the books—a much exacter designation; one which, if it had been retained, would have done something to prevent the almost universal misconception that the Bible is one book, and not a collection of books, the various offspring of 1200 years of literary activity—the collected fragments and remnants of a great national literature. What we have in the Bible is not one book, but a library brought together within the same covers. Even the plural form of the name was never used until the fifth century. Before that they were called the scriptures, or the writings.

Leaving the title and opening the book, what do we find? If it be a Catholic copy or one of the older Protestant copies, we shall find three divisions: the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, and the New Testament. We will, however, leave out of consideration the Apocrypha, although it is received by Catholics as of equal authority with the rest.

The two divisions that are left consist of

histories, legal enactments, poetry, prophecy, letters, myths, hymns, sermons, pamphlets, fly sheets, stories, parables, proverbs, treatises, and almost every kind of literary effort.

The Old Testament has in it thirty-nine separate books, and the New Testament twenty-seven, making a library of sixty-six little volumes in all. So far as the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament are concerned, they are, as I have said, the collected fragments and remnants of a great national literature. The lost books of the Bible would be an inestimable treasure if they could be found. It seems that there are no less than sixteen books missing from the Old Testament which clearly ought to be there; at least, which are referred to and quoted in the Bible as if they were genuine Old Testament Books. The Book of Jasher, the Book of Nathan and Gad, the Book of the Wars of the Lord, the Book of Ahijah and Iddo, Solomon's Parables and Treatise on Natural History, the Words of the Seers, the Prophecy of Enoch, and others are all mentioned; and in some places long quotations are given from them, such as David's lament over Saul and Jonathan. This is the first point that comes out in the most superficial examination of the Bible; that it contains the remnants of two great literatures—that of the Jewish nation, and that of the early Christian Church.

Then as to its authors. Many of the books are anonymous, and others, such as the Pentateuch, are attributed to people whom we know could never have written them, because they contain allusions to events which happened after they were dead. Who wrote the Book of Judges and of Joshua, the so-called Five Books of Moses, the Books of Samuel, the Book of Job, we shall never be able to settle; about some of them we cannot even make a guess. As for the others they represent all classes of society from King David to the shepherd Amos; there are women, poets, soldiers, musicians, fishermen, statesmen, physicians, men of all callings and all conditions, among the writers and contributors to this wonderful collection.

As to its date, the most erroneous opinions prevail. The notion formerly held was that the first five books of the Old Testament were written by Moses nearly 1500 years before Christ. But with the growth of modern scholarship this idea has been steadily losing ground. It is now seen that very large portions of those books could not have been written or arranged until long after Moses' death, probably not until he had been dead four hundred years. Moses did not write the account of his own death, Moses did not give in the Pentateuch the names of places which had no existence when he lived; or mention names of

weights and measures then unknown, or allude to events as past and well known which only happened after his death, or show a technical acquaintance with the topography of a land he was never allowed to enter. Moses probably wrote very little, only the Ten Commandments, the Song of Miriam, and one or two other passages. In some form or other, 'the Law,' as this part of the Bible was called, was probably first put together in Samuel's time—perhaps by Samuel; but in the form in which we have it, not until about four hundred and fifty B.C., in the reign of Nehemiah. The Genesis myth of the creation of the world, the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had long been transmitted in oral form, and no doubt date back much before Moses. They may, indeed, have existed in a written form as family records, but were certainly not brought together in the way we have them until a late period in Jewish history.

Our English Bible is, as you know, a translation from certain Hebrew and Greek MSS. But this which we call the Authorized Version to-day was not the first of such translations. It is the last but one of the series beginning with the work of Tyndale, Coverdale, and their compeers, followed by the Geneva, the Bishops', the Douay Bible and others, until at last under the patronage of King James I in 1611, 294 years ago, the

version was published with which we are all so familiar.

Now I must call your attention to two or three particulars of our English Bible. You will find as you open it that it is divided not only into books, but these books are cut up into chapters and verses. Are these chapters and verses any part of the original? Not at all. We need to bear this in mind because sometimes it is a matter of great practical importance. There are no chapters and verses in the Hebrew and Greek, but each book consists of one solid mass of words, without divisions of any sort, without capitals or marks of punctuation. Not until 1551 was the Bible printed with its present divisions of chapter and verse, by Henry Stephens, the great printer-scholar of his time. The divisions, though often convenient, yet often obscure the sense and break the connexion; and the verse arrangement especially has been a fruitful source of textual polemics, resulting in bad blood and bad theology. The verse divisions are often so purely arbitrary that in many instances it would have been just as accurate if the text had been divided into sections of half an inch in length without any regard to their meaning.

Another thing peculiar to our English Bible is the chapter headings and running titles, indicating, according to King James's translators, the mean-

ing of the authors. With the exception of the Psalms they all date from 1611. They are no part of the Bible. Many of them are not only fanciful but grossly incorrect. They are really a process of interpreting Scripture according to the theology which was orthodox in 1611. It is these headings which have caused that noble eastern love-poem, the Song of Songs, to be so misunderstood and ridiculed, turning a beautiful human lesson into an allegory of Christ and his Church. Many of the running titles in the Pentateuch and Prophets are equally absurd.

Let us remember, then, as we handle the Bible that the original writers are not responsible for these headings any more than they are responsible for the divisions into chapters and verses.

One other thing about our English Bible must be borne in mind. Let us grant for a moment that the original Hebrew and Greek MSS. are the infallible word of God. Nevertheless, as we open our English Bible, we cannot feel that we have in our hands an infallible translation of this infallible work. No one claims that the translators were infallible. We have only their judgment as to what the original writers meant, put into the best English they knew. But now we know that many portions of the existing Hebrew and Greek MSS. were copied from other sources.

Were those copyists infallibly protected from error? The records, had they been originally infallible, would still have needed special and continuous miracle (which no one claims) to protect them through generations of oral tradition, cuneiform, and hieroglyphic picture-writing, many languages, many scribes, many printers. No two translations are exactly alike. Even in the Revised Version, made by the best scholarship in the world, the American and English members differed very seriously as to the meaning of certain words and phrases. These differences are so important that an appendix has been added containing them. Supposing even that 3500 years ago God Almighty spoke a few sentences face to face with Moses, there is no conceivable machinery or combination of circumstances which could ensure the perfectly accurate transmission of those words to us. We have received them through records which, while generally trustworthy, cannot be trusted in many of their minute details, and through men who were as liable to err as we are. We may well believe that nothing essential has been lost; but we cannot believe that everything preserved has been preserved without mistake. Yet in our English Bible as it is, what a boon we have! Even the obscurer parts of the Pentateuch are full of moral and spiritual teaching of eternal value. In spite of

their unintelligent and often superstitious interpretation, how mightily have the Scriptures worked for life and godliness! Many who use the Bible in a very faulty way have yet found it to be the Bread of Life unto their souls. It is like the air we breathe: we may pollute it but we cannot do without it. It is like wheaten flour: we may cook it badly, and make an indigestible mess of it instead of palatable bread; but even as heavy and unpalatable dough it sustains human life. Englishmen have long misunderstood and misapplied many parts of the Bible; yet how much of what is best in the English character, how much of its love of honesty and plain dealing, its reverence for domestic purity, its passion for freedom, may be traced to the familiarity of our fathers with the letter of the Bible! And if the Bible has exercised so great an influence over men who so often used it wrongly, how much greater will be its influence when it is everywhere used with intelligence, by men who are alive to the eternal difference between the letter and the spirit!

III

THE TEXT AND THE CANON

In connexion with these lectures I have received an interesting letter in which the writer says: '*If we admit that any part of the Bible is mistaken, how can we have confidence with regard to the rest? Either it is all inspired or every man is free to pick and choose as he pleases.*'

Now this is not at all an uncommon frame of mind. Often in the course of controversy the cry is raised, 'The whole Bible or nothing.' In the 'Life of Lord Shaftesbury,' we are told that this great-hearted but narrow-minded man was much shocked by the assertion that the Books of Chronicles and the Gospel of St. Luke were not on the same level of inspiration. He replied: '*There is no security whatever except in standing upon the faith of our fathers, and saying that the blessed old book is God's word written from the very first syllable to the very last, and from the last book to the first.*' But is it true that we are shut

up to the alternative, the whole Bible or nothing ?

If we speak of a gold mine we do not mean to say that nothing but gold is found there : what we mean is that while quartz, and sand, and mud, and rubble are there, gold is its valuable and distinctive product. What would you think of a miner who should say : 'How am I to tell the difference between the gold and the rubbish ?' You would say : 'You must use your eyes, your common sense, and the tests which a knowledge of mining supply.' The Bible is a gold mine ; but all is not gold found there, and we have to discriminate. We are told that to destroy a verse or a letter of the Bible is to destroy the whole ; either all is true or nothing can be relied upon. But you never think of applying the 'all or nothing theory' to any other book. If I open the Globe edition of Shakespeare, I find included among his plays, 'Timon of Athens,' which, when I carefully examine, I conclude was written by Shakespeare only in part. But do I therefore invalidate Shakespeare's claim to be the author of 'Hamlet' ? Or do I ask the foolish question, how am I to know that anything is by Shakespeare if I admit that he did not write every word of that which passes under his name ? The answer is obvious. You must discriminate : you must bring to bear the tests furnished by wide reading, by literary criticism, by familiarity

with Shakespeare and his comrades, and, above all, by good sense.

You would think the man a fool who threw away his Shakespeare because it turned out that 'Timon of Athens' was not from Shakespeare's pen at all; and what shall we say of men who declare that the Bible is worthless for a similar reason? When a man asks how he may know whether this portion of the Bible is inspired or not, I answer, Use your common sense; what is the impression the passage makes on you? Do you feel it to be an utterance of quickening, hallowing power? How does it compare with other utterances about whose inspiration you have no doubt? And if you are warned that in all this you are just trusting to the light of reason, I answer, What else is a man to trust? Unless he brings his reason to bear upon religious problems—reason enlightened by conscience, affection, experience, and knowledge, what else can he bring to bear? But his reason may deceive him. Yes, and so may our eyes deceive us, when they tell us that the sun goes round the earth. Often we have to correct the testimony of our eyes by knowledge obtained in other ways. Yet, on the whole, our eyes are the guides God intended us to follow, and we do not pluck them out because once and again they make mistakes. So, on the whole, reason is the guide God intends us to follow

in religion, and we do not discard its testimony because sometimes it is mistaken. If reason ever leads us astray it is simply because we have not exercised it diligently enough.

This much, then, to dispose of an objection which has troubled some who are attending these lectures.

To-night our subject is the Text and the Canon. By the text we mean the original Hebrew and Greek MSS. from which our translation is made.

Now it may surprise some of you to know that there is no one original Hebrew or Greek MS. containing the books of our Bible. There is no one authorized copy of the Old Testament in Hebrew, no one authorized copy of the New Testament in Greek. There are great numbers of MSS., some older than the others; but no two of them exactly alike, so that scholars, before they translate, have to construct a text—that is, have to compare and collate, and out of various MSS., and various readings, compile a Greek Testament, from which they make the translation.

Let us take the New Testament. We have in the world a collection—not in any one place, but in many places—of nearly 1700 Greek MSS. of the New Testament. Sometimes a MS. is complete, containing all the books, sometimes

containing certain books not now admitted, sometimes omitting books which we receive.

Are all these MSS. alike? Does there seem to have been any supernatural supervision exercised in making these copies to keep out errors or mistakes? You can judge for yourselves when I tell you that in these 1700 MSS. there are nearly 150,000 various readings. It is only just to say, of course, that the larger part of these variations are minute, not touching matters of great importance; sometimes only the difference in the spelling of a word; sometimes a difference in the name of a place; but some of them are important enough to extend to whole paragraphs and parts of chapters.

These variations came about in the most natural way. Through the errors of copyists; through the desire of copyists to make something clear which they thought they could do by changing one word for another; through differences of opinion as to the evidence for this and that story or utterance; through the incorporation into the text of some comment made by a learned father; and alas! through the wilful changing or insertion of words to bolster up a particular theological doctrine, these variations were produced. Most of them are the simple errors of copyists, mere slips of eye, ear, memory, or judgment. If you have ever had a long letter

copied by the hands of a clerk, or if you have ever attempted to do any copying yourself, you know how easy it is to leave out or mis-spell a word, or to substitute a wrong one, or to make any one of a dozen common errors. If, however, you remember that these Greek MSS. were not divided into chapters and verses, but were written solid, without capitals, without punctuation marks, without any division even into paragraphs, you will see how easy it was for errors of one kind or another to creep in.

But, you say, surely the earliest MSS. of all would be free from most of these errors, and if we translate from them we shall be all right. But the earliest MSS. of all are copies of copies, of copies, of copies! Do you know we have no MS. of the New Testament earlier than the fourth century? There are three MSS. earliest in date which are reckoned as the greatest authorities on the Text of the New Testament. The oldest in existence is the Sinaitic; the next is the Vatican; and the third is the Alexandrian. The Sinaitic is at St. Petersburg; the Vatican is at Rome; and the Alexandrian in the British Museum.

The Sinaitic and the Vatican belong to the fourth, and the Alexandrian to the fifth century. That is to say, we have no MS. that takes us back nearer to Jesus than 300 years after his death.

But we know from other sources that if earlier MSS. could be recovered they would be as full of differences as those we possess. The works of the Fathers of the second and third centuries contain quotations from the New Testament, many of which do not at all agree with each other; and these same Fathers are constantly charging their opponents with wilfully corrupting the text of Scripture for their own party purposes. The greatest name of those days is that of Origen, and, writing on this subject, he says: '*As the case stands, it is obvious that the difference between the copies is considerable, partly from the carelessness of individual scribes, partly from the wicked daring of some in correcting what is written, partly from those who add or remove what seems good to them in the process of correction.*'

He himself expressly notices thirteen different readings in the four Gospels. If even the first autograph MSS. from the writers' hands were before us, we should not feel confident that we had received in every case the exact words of Jesus. For the Evangelists themselves tell us how often the disciples misunderstood their Master. When he called himself '*The Bread of Life,*' and said, '*He that eateth me shall live by me,*' they understood the words literally and could make no sense of them. How can we be sure of the verbal accuracy of reporters who

are so liable to be stuck fast by the letter? I have no doubt that, on the whole, we have in the Gospels an account which gives us substantially the sayings and the teaching of Jesus; but we have no such infallibly accurate account as justifies us in building a tremendous doctrine—such, for instance, as that of everlasting punishment—on the literal rendering of a couple of texts. Before a doctrine so awful is offered me for belief, I should like to be assured that the meagre texts on which it is based do really report the very words of Jesus, and that it has no other authority than the blunder of a copyist. Why, these three great MSS. preserved to us, differ from each other on many minor and some important points. The Alexandrian MS. contains the Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, and omits the first twenty-four chapters of St. Matthew. The Vatican MS. does not contain the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon—nor the Apocalypse. The Sinaitic MS., procured by the great scholar Tischendorf from an old monastery on Mount Sinai in the year 1859, contains the Epistle to Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas—two books now rejected. When these MSS. contain the same books they differ as to many words and phrases in them, and we are thrown back on probability, on common sense, and on human scholarship as to which is the most likely reading.

The difficulties of the text are still greater in Hebrew. The number of ancient Hebrew MSS. is very few, nor do any of them date from before Christ. You must remember that Hebrew had been a dead language nearly 400 years B.C. The language of the Jews in Palestine was Aramaic, and of the Jews who lived in the towns of the Mediterranean, Greek. For the benefit of the Jews living in Palestine, translations of the Old Testament had been made into Aramaic, and these were called Targums; for the Jews living in the Levant, a translation had been made into Greek. There is no sign that either Jesus or any of his disciples had any knowledge of Hebrew. The quotations from the Old Testament in the New are never from the Hebrew, they are mostly from the Greek translation called the Septuagint. The Septuagint was a version made at Alexandria for the Jews who had settled in the Levant. There is a pretty story of its formation. It relates that one of the Ptolemies, wishing to adorn his Alexandrian library with the writings of all nations, requested from the Jews of Jerusalem a Greek version of their Scriptures; that the Jews of Jerusalem sent seventy elders to Alexandria, well skilled both in Hebrew and Greek; that the king separated them from each other, so that each lived in his own cell, nor had any communication with another, and bade them all

translate the several books of the Old Testament; that when they came together before Ptolemy, at the end of their labours, God was glorified, for all the seventy versions made apart agreed exactly from beginning to end in every word and phrase. Justin Martyr, in relating the story, adds that he was taken to see the seventy cells in which the translators worked! In reality there can be no doubt that the version was gradually made by several authors and at different times. It seems to have been finally completed about 200 B.C. It was this version that was quoted by the Apostles; which was everywhere appealed to in the early Christian Church; and which the Ethiopian eunuch was reading when Philip met him.

It included what the Hebrew Bible did not include—the Apocrypha; and this is how the Apocrypha came to pass into use in the Christian Church. The Apocrypha forms no part of the Hebrew Bible.

Now, all that I have said about the errors of copyists and the various readings of different MSS. with regard to the New Testament, applies to the Old, with this further element bearing upon the question of literal verbal accuracy. You are aware, perhaps, that the Hebrew language, as originally written, was made up entirely of consonants: that is, Hebrew words as written

had no vowels at all. The vowel sounds which made the consonants pronounceable were handed down orally. It was not until 600 years after Christ that the accent marks were added, which point out to the student where the vowels should come in, and what they should be. Thus a word of three consonants might mean this or that according to the vowel sounds added; and these vowel sounds must be added according to the judgment of the reader as to the meaning. Suppose English were printed without vowels, and you should find a word of the three consonants, 'p.p.r.' It might mean paper, or piper, or pepper—you would gather the meaning from the context. Or suppose the word consisted of two consonants, 'p.n.' It might be pen, or pun, or pan, or pain, according to the vowel sound added. Do you not see how this must have added to the difficulty of translation and have been an additional source of error? That I may not convey a false impression, let me quote an actual instance given by Professor Robertson Smith. In one passage Jacob is represented as uttering his dying words to his sons while leaning upon his *bed*. Another passage referring to the same scene, tells us that he did so leaning on his *staff*. This is easy of explanation when we know that the two words bed and staff are in Hebrew *one* word, and may be made to mean either bed

or staff, according to the vowel sound added. What a wide field for misconception and error there is open here![1]

Now let me say a few words about the *Canon*. Canon means a rule—it first referred to a carpenter's rule or measure, and from that came to be applied to any standard by which things were judged. Thus the canons of art are the rules of art. A canon in music is a piece of music which follows a very strict rule, the melody being the model on which all the other parts are formed. Even the Canon of a Cathedral gets his title in the same way; he is one belonging to an order and under a certain definite rule of discipline. So the Canonical books of the Bible—the Canon—are the books that have a right to be there, because they answer and come up to a certain rule or standard of judgment. They have been measured and found to be inspired and authentic.

But the curious thing is that nobody knows what this rule is or who framed it. Are all the books included in the Bible that ought to be there? Well, nobody knows. The Canon was not settled all at one time: like Topsy, it 'growed.' Look at the Old Testament. There was no such book at all as the Old Testament until 450 B.C. In

[1] A striking instance is noted by Dr. G. Adam Smith in his commentary on Isaiah xxix.—the obscure oracle of Oriel. '*Ariel* may mean either *the Lion of God* or *the Hearth of God*.' p. 211.

its present form it was the work of Ezra and his scribes. But right up to the destruction of Jerusalem it was a matter of dispute whether Esther, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, the Maccabees, and other books of the Apocrypha, should or should not be included; and the dispute was only stopped by the destruction of the Temple, and the dispersion of the Jews, which put an end to the growth of the Old Testament.

Thus, without any superhuman guidance, the Canon of the Old Testament came to be settled. And in my judgment some of the books which were left out were more worthy of a place than some which were left in. Or take the New Testament. It is possible, in this case, to follow the process of formation more closely than in the case of the Old Testament.

From the way in which the New Testament is commonly regarded, one would suppose that it came down from heaven, as the Koran of the Moslem fable did, in a single night: that it was written either by the Almighty hand or at his immediate dictation. But what we find is, that for ages the New Testament writings were not regarded as Scripture at all. A Christian of the second century would have been as much shocked as a Jew at putting them on a level with the Old Testament. The Bible of the Christian

Church—for at least 200 years after Christ—was the Old Testament, and the Old Testament only. Oral tradition was esteemed of greater value than the written Epistles and Gospels. By the close of the second century, however, a change appears. Certain New Testament books have come into general favour, and are beginning to be reverenced and quoted and set apart as a new collection of inspired writings. As time went on they grew more and more into use by the Churches, and came to be read side by side with the Old Testament. Nobody settled this. It settled itself. Accident, taste, practical needs, good sense, settled it. Yet for centuries the various Churches continued to use side by side with the writings which make up our New Testament, various books which we call spurious. It is curious to note that hardly one of the great Fathers of the Church draws the line of canonicity where we draw it. In almost every case they include some books that we reject, or reject some that we include. Irenæus, one of the earliest and most authentic, rejects five books now in the New Testament—Hebrews, Jude, James, II Peter, and III John, while he includes the Shepherd of Hermas. The celebrated Tertullian rejects all the books of the New Testament, except the four Gospels, Acts, thirteen Epistles of Paul, the Apocalypse, and I John. That is,

he rejects Hebrews, Jude, I and II Peter, II and III John, and James.

Meanwhile, every Church did as it pleased, and the greatest confusion prevailed until the year A.D. 332, when the Emperor Constantine entrusted Eusebius with authority to make a complete collection of the sacred writings for the use of the Catholic Church. The list contained all the present books except the Revelation of St. John. And so it went on, and notwithstanding decisions of the Councils, books continued to be read in the Churches which were not on the list, and others on the list were regarded with suspicion. Jerome and Augustine were much divided in opinion. The Roman Catholic Church has never heartily accepted the Hebrews. Even Protestants were far from unanimity in regard to the right of certain books to be in the Bible. They claimed for themselves freedom of judgment to say what is Scripture. 'The Fourth Book of Esdras,' said Luther, 'I toss into the Elbe.' The Epistle of James he called 'An Epistle of straw.' Erasmus maintained that the Epistle to the Hebrews, II Peter, II and III John, and the Apocalypse were not written by Apostles; but he says he does not esteem them of less value on that account, for if they contain good teaching it does not matter by whom they were written. Calvin, in like manner, thought that Hebrews

and II Peter were not written by Apostles. He is doubtful about James and Jude, but he approves of them because, he says, 'they contain useful reading'—a very sensible and sufficient reason.

In 1545 the Papal Church called the Council of Trent to deal with the heresies of the Reformation. At this Council, and for the first time in the history of the Christian Church, the question of the contents of the Bible was made an absolute article of faith and confirmed by an anathema. The books of the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, and the New Testament, as we have known it, were declared to be all on the same level, and to have doubts about any of them was to bring down a curse upon the soul. In this Council there was not one great scholar, nor one German divine. So that while it has been a great feature of Protestantism to refer to the authority of the Bible instead of the Pope, it was the Papal Church that set up a hard and fast line about the books of the Bible and made it heresy to question them.

Such is the story of New Testament canonicity. Such were the accidents and vicissitudes to which the New Testament writings were subjected before they arrived at the position of supernatural and infallible authority. Nowhere along the line have we a particle of evidence of any supernatural guidance or illumination which enabled those who judged these books and others to decide

which were and which were not of miraculous origin. The most varied motives contributed to the final arrangement—some prudential, some superstitious, but scarcely any based on sound scholarship.

Among the strangers who are attending these lectures, some may be startled and shocked when they hear it declared that the Bible is not infallible—that it is entirely a human book—that it has grown, as other things have grown, in a natural way, and has not been preserved from error any more than Shakespeare's Plays or Plato's Dialogues. But let me tell you that all this does not take away one jot from the beauty and worth of the Bible as a whole. Like you, I once believed in an infallible book; but I can honestly say that the Bible means far more to me now that the scales have dropped from my eyes and I see it as a human production than when I believed in its Divine origin. It is easy for the scholarship of to-day to see that the men who are responsible for our Bible being what it is now made many and grave mistakes. Nevertheless, could we understand all the circumstances, we should very probably be surprised, and certainly we should see that we had reason to be grateful, that these mistakes were not more and graver still. That the books which have been declared Canonical and handed down as

such to us are so unique, shows that a great and wonderful law like that which scientific men call 'natural selection,' or 'the survival of the fittest,' has been at work in the Bible, and has preserved to us the things fullest of Divine wisdom and teaching. Twelve hundred years of religious Evolution, and of the development of the moral and spiritual powers of a specially religious race, have given us our Bible.

It contains the prayers, the hymns, the story of the moral progress, the failures, the aspirations, the autobiography of human nature on its religious side, from its infancy to its perfection.

> Out from the heart of Nature rolled
> The burdens of the Bible old;
> The word unto the prophets spoken,
> Was writ on tables yet unbroken;
> Still floats upon the morning wind,
> Still whispers to the willing mind;
> One accent of the Holy Ghost
> The heedless world has never lost!

IV

THE REVISED VERSION

It is a matter of thankfulness that we have at last a Revised Version of the Bible in our hands, a Bible which is free from the adulterations and obscurities that have so long marred its beauty and its meaning. Like most great undertakings, it had been for a long time 'in the air' before it was actually taken in hand. Although divines and scholars and the educated laity were perfectly aware that the Authorized Version contained many errors, both of text and translation, that phrases had been tampered with in order to back up certain doctrines, that passages had been inserted which formed no part of the original, and that, instead of sound scholarship, King James's translators often displayed a theological bias; yet the shrinking from change was so great, and the fear of consequences so cowardly, that the matter was delayed from time to time, till for very shame it could be put off no longer.

Of course there were great difficulties in the way. There was the veneration and love which had gathered for so many years around the Old Version, and which regarded any attempt at revision with as much horror as the dissection of the body of some dear friend. There was the latent fear that in the event of a thorough and honest revision, men would have to give up some of their old notions and doctrines which had been based upon interpolations and bad translations. This dread sometimes took a ludicrous shape. I remember lecturing, now thirty-five years ago, on the need of revision, doing what little I could in my own circle to create a right public opinion on the subject, when a good man got up, and in a voice trembling with emotion, deprecated laying any hands on the Sacred Ark. He said, 'I owe my conversion to a certain text in one of St. Paul's Epistles. Now, suppose in a revised version that text should be omitted on the ground that it is an interpolation—where should I be?' Where indeed? There was, of course, no arguing with an ignorance, a density, and a fear like that. Then there was the dread that the New Version might substitute for the simple, graceful, and idiomatic diction we so much loved, a strange, modern, learned, inkhorn diction. There was really some ground for this apprehension, because

in previous attempts at revision by private hands such frightful sins against good taste had been committed, as to make revision a byword. In 1768, a divine named Haywood offered the world a new translation of the New Testament, 'with freedom, spirit, and elegance,' as he phrased it. Here are two specimens of his improvements. For '*the child is not dead*' in the old version, he gave '*the young lady is not dead*'; and the opening of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, '*a certain man had two sons*,' he changed into '*a gentleman of splendid family and opulent fortune had two sons*.'

Benjamin Franklin tried his hand at the Book of Job. You all recollect the famous verse in our translation: '*Then Satan answered the Lord and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?*' Franklin makes this, '*Does your Majesty imagine that Job's good conduct is the effect of mere personal attachment and affection?*'

Bishop Louth sins also in the attempt to substitute fine English for the simple, idiomatic English of the Authorized Version. Thus, in his translation of the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, he changes the phrase, '*Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem*' into '*Speak ye animating words to Jerusalem*.'

I am sorry to confess that one of my predecessors in the pulpit of the Old Meeting fell into the

same pit. In a Book of Prayers, prepared for this congregation, a revised Burial Service is included, with a new translation of the famous chapter in Corinthians which we read on those solemn occasions. You will remember the words, '*But some man will say, With what body do they come?*' And you will also remember the plain way in which St. Paul indicates his opinion of the intelligence of such an inquirer—'*Thou fool, that which thou sowest*,' etc. But *thou fool* was much too vulgar for our ancestors in this Church, and so they translated—'*Thou inconsiderate man*.' No wonder men dreaded the possibility of a revision giving them a Bible in fine English. Then it was said that the time was not ripe, that scholars were not yet agreed as to the authority of certain readings, that the version in use had answered all practical purposes for so many years that we need be in no hurry to amend it.

Happily these reasons could not hold their own against an enlightened public opinion. It was in June, 1870, that the Revisers began their labours.

They were divided into two companies—one for the Old Testament, and one for the New Testament. They were composed of the most eminent scholars England could furnish, and wisely chosen irrespective of creed or Church

No one can forget the celebrated communion service in Westminster Abbey, when, at the invitation of that loving, large, and catholic spirit, Dean Stanley, the Revisers met to implore the Divine blessing on their labours, and Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Independent, Baptist, and Unitarian knelt together at the same altar, and received in common the touching memorials of the Christian faith. The work begun with such high hopes and in such a liberal spirit was carried through with admirable energy, patience, temper, and skill. Few people have any conception of the amount of time and labour given, without one penny of reward, by the Revisers. The Old Testament Company were fifteen years at work. They sat for 792 days and every day for six hours. The New Testament company sat for nearly 500 days, and in addition there was an immense mass of correspondence with the American company which sat at the same time. And the result is that we have at last something like the true Bible in our hands. Not that all obscure parts have yet been made clear, nor that it is settled in every case which is the true reading. The Revised Version contains a mass of marginal notes, which appear as alternative readings, and in as many as 1200 instances the American company differ from their English brethren, their differences having been recorded

in appendixes. But in the present state of knowledge and scholarship we have a version perhaps as near perfection as we could hope to attain.

This is a result and a success in which the adherents of a liberal Christianity especially rejoice. Not that in the nature of things we are likely to feel quite so deep an interest in getting the best rendering of the best text as our Evangelical and orthodox friends ought to feel. For I suppose most of us believe that the true credentials of religion lie deeper than Authorized Version, or Revised Version, or Greek MSS., or Hebrew vowel points: that they are written, not with pen and ink, nor even engraved on tables of stone, but rather stamped indelibly on the fleshly tablets of the human heart.

Our religion would survive, I imagine, not only the corruption of texts, but the very destruction of the Bible itself, and re-create itself with every new-born soul, for '*of such is the kingdom of heaven*.' This is not to say we do not feel the immense importance and preciousness of the Bible, both as a record of the religious history of man and a fountain of living inspiration. Only with us it is not the Bible alone that is our religion; for us the Bible is not the only word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Yet it is so great and valuable a word that we earnestly desire

to have it in an accurate form. We do not want the theology of the tenth, or the seventeenth, or the nineteenth centuries obtruded upon us as we read the sweet, passionate lyrics of the Book of Psalms, or when we listen to the heart-moving words of Jesus. That the Bible should speak for itself has been our desire all along, and so we especially rejoice that all which made the Bible speak with another voice than its own has been done away.

For instance, what an enormous amount of mischief has been done by the headings of the chapters and the running titles at the top of the pages of the Authorized Version, professing to tell us what they are about. These headings and titles are really little doctrinal sermons, foisting a particular theology into the Bible. We all know Carlyle's scorn of the 'Intelligent Editor' and the 'Intelligent Commentator,' who does so much to darken counsel with words; and some of you will remember the story of the poor woman to whom a tract was given containing the parable of the Prodigal Son with explanations, and who, on being questioned, said 'she understood the parable quite easily, and hoped some day to understand the explanation.' So the Bible tells its own tale, as a rule, quite clearly; yet finger-posts were put up by King James's translators, who wanted it to tell their tale. For instance,

what is called the 'Christology of the Old Testament,' that is, finding in it numberless references to the unborn Christ, is largely due to the chapter headings, by which the divines of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries tried to make the Bible support the doctrine of Christ's pre-existence. If ordinary people had not been told that a certain account or description by the prophet of Cyrus or Hezekiah was really a description of Christ, it would never have entered into their heads to make the application. The celebrated chapter in Isaiah (ch. ix) where we have the words, '*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace,*' refers, as every careful reader may see, to Hezekiah. He is the wonderful child who shall restore peace and glory to Israel and reign in righteousness. But the chapter heading is 'Christ's birth and kingdom'; and the phrase, 'the mighty God,' which Dr. Rowland Williams tells us should be 'the mighty Hero,' has been often quoted to prove the deity of Christ. If it proves deity at all, it proves the deity of Hezekiah. But it does no such thing. Now it is a great gain that in the Revised Version those chapter headings are done away and the Bible is allowed to speak for itself.

The next thing that strikes the reader of the Revised Version is the abolition of the purely arbitrary divisions of chapter and verse—divisions which often break the connexion and mar the sense and create many difficulties for the reader. In the Revised Version the text is arranged in paragraphs, the old numbers of the chapters and verses being given at the side for the sake of convenience in reference, and no one can fail to see that the sense of the Bible is much more connected and more comprehensible in this way than in the Authorized Version.

A third general feature of the revision remains to be noticed—the printing of all the songs, psalms and poetry verse-wise, so as to show at once that we are dealing with poetry and not with prose. It is a great gain that the songs and national ballads interspersed through the historical books should be printed as songs, and we should know them to be what they are, quotations from ancient books of national poetry. Probably if that little extract from an old ballad-book given in Joshua x. had been originally printed as it is now, a good deal of troublesome speculation might have been spared about that most perplexing of all alleged miracles—the standing still of the sun. A phrase of poetry would never have been mistaken for a statement of fact.

Let me now refer you to a more important matter. How far does the Revised Version affect questions of doctrine? Now that we have a translation no longer biased by the theology of a particular school, how is the theology of the various schools affected? We are loudly assured that everything remains as it was, that the orthodox theology, the theology of the creeds and the articles, the theology of popular Evangelicalism and of popular Anglicanism, come out of the trial unscathed. 'Not one of these changes,' cries Bishop Wordsworth, 'affects one tittle or iota of the Christian faith.' 'It is certain,' echoes Canon Farrar, 'that no questions of faith or doctrine are altered by the New Testament.' It is boldly asserted that, in spite of changes and omissions, nothing has occurred which need give a moment's alarm or even thought to the orthodox theologian. Nothing has happened! On the contrary, I aver that very much has happened, and that this is so well known, that it almost looks as if there were a conspiracy to keep the Revised Version out of use in our churches on this very score. Why, this has happened at the least—no one who comprehends the simple facts of the Revised Version can any longer hold that the Bible is infallible. In the New Testament alone, the total list of changes in text and translations, including

changes of punctuation, number 36,191. In 1600 cases the Greek text from which the Authorized Version was made has been changed; in 18,000 cases words have been changed by a substituted rendering, and 4600 words have been added in translation. In all, seventeen per cent. of the words of the New Testament have been more or less altered. Of course out of this vast multitude of variations from the Authorized Version, only a very small proportion relate to what are commonly known as doctrinal passages. Nevertheless, the whole body of them bears heavily in virtue of its sheer numerical weight, on one point of doctrine—that of infallibility. It is impossible to regard as infallible a book in which the last revision has made 36,000 corrections, and which the American Revisers tell us ought to be corrected in 400 additional places.

Notice at the outset two or three striking omissions from the commonly received text. Perhaps it was a matter of course that the celebrated passage should be struck out—'*For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.*'[1] The evidence against it is so overwhelming that for a long time it has been given up by the most ardent defenders of the Trinity. The revisers, who, with one exception, were all Trinit-

[1] 1 *John* v. 7.

arians, declare unanimously that this celebrated passage is no part of the Bible at all, but that it was inserted by some over-zealous disciple to bolster up a favourite doctrine, and like honest men they have ruthlessly cut it out. But what are we to say to those who assert that its omission makes no difference to orthodox doctrine? It is the only text in the Bible which clearly states the doctrine of the Trinity: in no other place is it declared that '*these three are one*'; it is the one unmistakable proof text from which thousands of sermons have been preached. The doctrine is only inferred from other texts; in no other place is it explicitly taught. Does it make no difference to the scripture proof of a doctrine that the one and only text which plainly declared it is now pronounced a forgery? It is only childishness and folly to say everything is as it was, and revision has made no difference.

Our Baptist friends have been accustomed to justify their refusal of baptism to children, and their doctrine of believers' baptism only, by the requirement of Philip and the confession of faith on the part of the eunuch of Candace before his baptism: and Philip said, '*If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest* (*be baptized*). *And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God.*'[1] But now when the Baptist turns

[1] *Acts* viii. 37.

to the New Testament he cannot find his favourite passage: it has no place in the best manuscripts, and the revisers have expunged it as an interpolation. No other text so clearly upheld the Baptist position, and yet we are told that its excision leaves the question untouched!

Another noticeable omission is the explanation that the troubling of the water in the pool of Bethesda was due to the interposition of an angel.[1] The verse containing this picturesque incident is declared by the revisers to be no part of the original narrative. It is a striking instance of the growth of miraculous stories. What we see happened in this case, we are led to believe is what happened in many other cases. Everything strange and unaccountable in the ancient world was at once put down to supernatural agency. At Bethesda, as in many places well known to health-seekers, there was an intermittent spring having medicinal properties. The author of this Gospel was familiar with the virtues of the Bethesda spring, which he leaves us to suppose were due to natural causes. But a later copyist, possessed by the spirit which sees the miraculous in anything strange, must needs introduce by a little touch a supernatural element into the story. In this case the too busy hand has been detected in the very act of turning the simple

[1] *John* v. 4.

into the miraculous. But in how many undetected cases may the simple, natural incidents of the life of Jesus have thus received a supernatural explanation? The revisers have shown us here a miracle in the making, and, to my mind, the sight is most instructive.

Leaving unnoticed other important omissions, let me call your attention to some improved renderings of passages that have a bearing on Christian doctrine.

Roman Catholics and High Churchmen have long been in the habit of quoting the words, '*There shall be one fold and one shepherd*,'[1] as showing that there ought to be one only visible church on earth. But this text is now rendered, not *one fold*, but *one flock*, a very different matter. *One fold* is one visible organization, one divinely appointed church; but *one flock* may be gathered in many folds, and scattered in many churches.

Our evangelical friends have for ages made much of the words, '*Without shedding of blood is no remission*.'[2] This has been one of the cardinal texts of their theology—proving the necessity of the actual blood-shedding of Jesus to the forgiveness of sins. But is not their favourite doctrine shaken to its foundations by the new rendering of the whole verse? '*And according to the law, I may almost say, all things*

[1] *John* x. 16. [2] *Hebrews* ix. 22.

are cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission.' Now we see that these words were uttered not at all as expressing a Christian truth, but as a reproach to Judaism. Judaism taught that without shedding of blood there is no remission, but the writer's point is that Christianity teaches something far better.

Or look at some of the well-known and often quoted proof texts of the doctrine of Christ's Deity. Here is the famous one, '*God manifest in the flesh.*'[1] The revisers tell us that the word God 'rests on no sufficient ancient evidence,' but that the passage should read, '*He who was manifested in the flesh.*' Does this make no difference to the proof of the Godhead of Christ? It is a great difference. One striking proof text is now admitted to be no proof at all, having no bearing on the question.

One other instance will suffice. Here are the words: '*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.*'[2] According to this rendering it was God who laid down his life for us and died on the cross, and in this sense it has been triumphantly used as proving that Christ is God. But how does this Revised Version run? '*Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us.*' The fact is, the old transcribers and translators were so full of a certain theology

[1] 1 *Timothy* iii. 16. [2] 1 *John* iii. 16.

that they read it into the Bible on every possible occasion, and whenever they came to the pronoun 'he' for Jesus, naturally foisted into it their own doctrinal conceptions and at once changed it into the august name, God.

What in the face of these and similar facts of revision are we to say to the candour of those who tell us that things are just as they were, and that no Christian doctrine has been affected one jot or tittle? Many doctrines are affected. The word atonement no longer appears in the New Testament; the word predestination is gone; the word damnation is turned into judgment; *our vile body* becomes *the body of our humiliation*, and the ascetics are robbed of a text which justified them in macerating the flesh. Fasting is now no longer commanded by Christ; neither is it a command to search the Scriptures; money is no longer *the* root of *all* evil, but *a root of all kinds of evil*. The great Trinitarian text, '*These three are one*,' is no more, and two important texts proving the Godhead of Christ are shown to have no reference whatever to that doctrine. These are great gains to a more reasonable creed. I know we may easily make too much of them, but, on the other hand, we are invited to make nothing of them. The Revised Version is of great doctrinal significance. It tends to break down the rigidity of orthodoxy,

and it justifies that Liberal Christianity which we, in this place, hold and teach. We, at any rate, have every reason to be grateful for the help which the Revised Version gives us to a better understanding of the work of Christ and his Apostles. We who know the fatal force and fascination of words, and have learnt to realize the immense and inconceivable mistakes which have been made by nearly all English churches through the deficiencies and mistakes of the Authorized Version, welcome with the deepest thankfulness the Bible which the revisers have placed in our hands, as bringing before the English reader for the first time the true sense of inspired writers.

V

INFALLIBILITY

THOSE of you who have followed me with patience in the lectures already delivered will perhaps think it scarcely necessary to devote a whole evening to the subject of the infallibility of the Bible, since I have already given you many reasons to show the absurdity of such a doctrine. But the subject is so important, and the influence of the doctrine lingers so long, even when it has been formally abandoned, that I do not think it will be waste of time to look at it a little more closely. A doctrine which has been driven into the minds of English people for 300 years is not easily dislodged. Men will admit that it is without foundation, and yet they go on really acting upon it as if it had never been questioned. Look at the way men still appeal to 'texts' when they want to prove an article in their creed, or to demolish a theological opponent. Right reason, scholarship, experience, human feeling, common

sense, all these are nothing if a text can be quoted on the other side. I remember a debate, somewhat celebrated at the time, in which an evangelical clergyman persisted in interrupting his opponent by calling out 'Chapter and verse! chapter and verse!' as though the very words were a magic talisman of error. And men who say they do not contend for the infallibility of the Bible yet confidently quote isolated texts as though they settled the matter in dispute. They are compelled when hard pressed to give up the doctrine of Infallibility; but they think they can retain as tenaciously as ever the consequences and corollaries of the doctrine, phrases which spring out of it and have no meaning apart from it, and deductions which could flow from it alone. Look at the infinite efforts made by commentators and divines to explain discrepancies and reconcile contradictions, which, only that it is necessary to prove the Bible infallible, would have no significance whatever.

I propose to show you two things: (1) That an infallible standard in faith and morals is not desirable; and (2), if it is desirable, it is not to be found in the Bible.

1. We know that in many trade matters, in disputes about weights and measures, quantity and quality, it is desirable to have infallible standards of judgment from which no appeal

can be made. If we think we are cheated in the quantity of silk we buy, we can bring the shopkeeper's yard measure to an absolute test; we can even send round inspectors of weights and measures to detect the slightest departure from the infallible standard. In the same way, men often think there ought to be some outward, visible, infallible standard of religious truth and moral right. For the journey of life is no easy business, and man naturally longs for some guidance along its difficult and dangerous paths. He says to himself, 'God, my maker, cannot have meant me to face these dread perils, these tremendous issues, unguided by his wisdom, unsustained by his hand. There must be somewhere for me an infallible guide.' And having concluded, theoretically, that infallible guidance must be somewhere, man has gone on to imagine it in this or that, or to create it out of his superstitions, or has suffered himself to be deluded by priests, soothsayers, and oracles, that they have the sure and absolute truth.

The Jews had their Urim and Thummim, enchanted stones kept in a pouch of the high priest's breastplate, and consulted for direction in all times of grave perplexity. According to one tradition these stones changed colour, showing bright before a victory and dark before a defeat; while another tradition tells us that one stone

stood for 'yes,' another for 'no,' and a third was neuter, and that the three were used as lots, the high priest giving answer according as the one or the other was drawn out. Whatever the method, it is clear that Urim and Thummim were instruments of divination by which it was thought the will of God was made known. The Bible is also full of references to Egyptian 'magicians' and their 'enchantments,' to 'wizards,' 'sorcerers,' 'soothsayers,' all of whom professed to reveal the will of heaven, and to give infallible directions to those who observed their rites. The casting of lots was a favourite method of ascertaining the divine purpose. When the disciples, after the fall of Judas, met to elect a successor in his place, they chose two, and then, having prayed, they cast lots, and when the lot fell upon Matthias they supposed they had an infallible intimation of the will of God. Among the Romans the 'Sortes Virgilianæ' was a method of reading the future by consulting the Æneid of Virgil. You take up the book, open it at random, and the passage you touch by chance with your finger is the oracular response. The same method has been used with the Bible right up to our own time, and is called 'Sortes Biblicæ.' The Greeks had their oracles at Delphi and at Dodona. At Dodona, those gifted with the power to interpret listened to the rustling of the

leaves in an ancient oak, or to the moaning of doves in its branches, or to the resounding of the wind in the brazen tripods that surrounded the Temple, professing to gain in this manner a knowledge of the future. You will remember how, in the 'Winter's Tale,' Shakespeare makes Hermione, the wrongfully-accused Queen, appeal to the oracle of Apollo at Delphos. In Rome there were soothsayers and diviners, who watched the flights of certain birds and the movements of certain sacred animals, so claiming to interpret the will of the gods. To refer again to Shakespeare: when Julius Cæsar has misgivings about the fatal procession to the Capitol, he says to his servant, 'Go bid the priests do sacrifice, and bring me their opinions of success.' 'What say the augurers?' he asks when the servant returns, who replies—

> They would not have you stir forth to-day;
> Plucking the entrails of an offering forth,
> They could not find a heart within the beast.

It is this craving which men have for guidance, this shrinking from coming to a decision for themselves, this disinclination to take the trouble to judge what is right and wrong, that has given strength in the Roman Church to the dogma of the Pope's Infallibility, and in Protestant Churches to the dogma of the Infallibility of the

Bible. Men are cowards; they shrink from personal responsibility; they dread the sweat and the struggle of mental and spiritual conflict; they want things made easy and to be saved from the burden and care of exercising personal judgment; they would even give up that glorious prerogative of manhood, Free Will, if they could be sure of infallible guidance. In a remarkable passage Professor Huxley has told us that if some Power would undertake to wind him up like a watch every twenty-four hours so that he should infallibly do right, he would gladly give up his freedom of will. It is this feeling which, more than any other, induces men to go over to the Church of Rome. They want to be saved all these questions, all this trouble of choosing and judging for themselves; they want an easy time, and are glad to hand over moral and religious problems to the decision of anyone who will undertake for them. Yet natural and almost inevitable as is this craving, it is not healthy, it is not desirable; and that it is not so is shown in the fact that it has never been gratified. Guidance—yes, we all need that, and we all may have it; but not to the abnegation of our own reason and judgment. Infallible guidance is impossible if men are to be really virtuous, strong, wise, and capable: it means that men are to give up Free Will and become automata.

But without Free Will what virtue is there in what I do? If I cannot make a mistake, there is no goodness in doing right. If everything is to be settled for me, I lose the best part of mental and spiritual training—the training I go through in learning to judge, to reason, to form conclusions, to come to a decision.

We all understand the difference between teaching an intelligent boy *what* to think and *how* to think. Suppose that he has a problem to solve, or a sentence in a classical author to translate. The teacher may show him the solution in a moment, or read the sentence to him in English. So far he understands it—he knows what it means. He knows that sentence perfectly, *but it is all he knows*. There is, however, another way. The teacher may spend much time in instructing the boy, not only in the meaning of a particular sentence, but as to how sentences are formed, how the parts of a sentence are related, how to look in any sentence for the verb and the noun, and how their inflexions bear on the sense. The boy may not for the moment be able to tell what this particular sentence means as glibly as his comrade who has had it read off to him in English; but he is in the way of understanding in time, not this sentence only, but all sentences, and of attaining to a perfect knowledge of the language. But you know no boy will master a language

who has the sentences infallibly translated for him, or who has a crib to which he can always refer. You teach him *how* sentences are made, and then you throw him on his own resources, sure that in blundering is the only way to acquire mastery.

So it is in morals, so it is in religion. If everything were settled for us *we* should have no mental and no spiritual training, and at the end we should be just as much babies as ever. God does give us guidance; he puts certain great principles into our hands; he gives us a sense of right and wrong; he gives us reason, and conscience, and affection—divine lights and voices within us. But he does not send a visible, tangible guide with us through the unknown desert, to mark out every step for us, and to spare us all anxiety about the road. He rather instructs us as to the character of the country, the landmarks, the bearings of the stars, and leaves us to find our way for ourselves, assuring us that he is not ignorant of or indifferent to our prayers. We shall make blunders, but we shall be gaining power; we shall fall into mistakes, but we shall be training our reason, so that at last we are not babes but men. God will have us know for ourselves—not because he speaks to us through some infallible authority, but because by thinking, observing, experimenting, our natures are trained into nobler goodness and

into clearer wisdom than could ever be possible under infallible guidance.

2. My second point is that if such an infallible guide be desirable, it is not to be found in the Bible. As an infallible guide the Bible must be condemned for a lamentable failure. If it be an infallible directory for faith and conduct, telling men what to think and do, the differing sects and Churches of Christendom are an amazing phenomenon. Every sect goes to the Bible and finds there the infallible justification it looks for. The Pope gets out of one passage the doctrine of the Church's authority to forgive sins; the priest gets out of another passage the rite and dogma of baptismal regeneration; the Mormon gets out of it a sanction for polygamy; the monk draws from it the dogma that man's body is corrupt and must be macerated; the Independent finds that there ought to be no bishops; the Trinitarian that Jesus is God; the Unitarian that Jesus was only a man. The Calvinist finds the election of the few; the Universalist the salvation of all. All go to the same source, and yet all draw different conclusions. Where, then, is its infallibility if it speaks with such different voices? Here is the chronic difficulty—a revelation of truth, God's own truth from God's own lips, as many believe; and yet, among those who with their whole hearts accept the revelation, infinite diversities,

internecine strifes over these very words of the Eternal.

To treat the Bible as if it were an infallible receipt-book for all difficulties and doctrines, and apply its texts, most likely wrenched out of all connexion with the subjects on which they were meant to bear, to the easy solution of all controversies, as though the mere letter of one sentence settled everything, and the intellect had no other duty than that of humble acquiescence, is to make it an idol.

Do not misunderstand me. Once more, I repeat, I want to loosen no one's hold on the substantial truth of the Bible. But substantial truth is one thing, infallible truth is another. We have guidance in the Bible about the greatest matters—about God and duty, about righteousness and holy living, about love and peace and justice and immortality. We have the substantial truth; but we have also errors, mistakes, confusions, contradictions, and we have to get at the truth by the exercise of reason, judgment, and conscience.

I have already shown you that the English Bible is not free from error, and to contend for that would be contending that the translators, copyists, and printers were all miraculously preserved from mistake. What are the people who have held the Infallibility of the Authorized

Version of the New Testament to say to the fact I mentioned last Sunday, that the Revised Version contains 36,000 changes? I have shown you that there is no Greek and no Hebrew text free from error, and that no two of those ancient MSS. absolutely agree. The usual answer made to this mode of dealing with the question is, of course, that it is hypercritical: that it makes a mountain of a mole hill: that the mistakes of copyists and translators are altogether trifling. But a trifling mistake destroys infallibility. A thing is either perpendicular or it is not; there are no such things as degrees of perpendicularity. There are no such things as degrees of infallibility. One mistake vitiates the whole claim, for if the authority is mistaken on one point, what guarantee have we that it may not be mistaken on another? It is admitted that literally and verbally the Bible is not infallible, but we are told this does not matter. Although not infallible it contains the infallible word of God. And so, divines, having conceded our point of the fallibility of the Bible, are yet extremely angry when we point out that the world was not made in six days, or that it is not true that the Almighty approved of the wholesale slaughter of the Canaanites, or that the morality of the Pentateuch is defective. It is a fallible book, but it must not be questioned! And they are in the greatest fright if one bolder

than the rest ventures to tell the people that Matthew and Luke are at irreconcilable variance about the pedigree of Jesus, or that Peter misapplies a psalm, or that Paul was quite mistaken when he prophesied the immediate coming of Christ. The speaker is denounced as an Atheist, and a tremendous amount of devout ingenuity, or, rather, indevout acuteness, is shown in the attempt to reconcile discrepancies or explain away plain statements by forcing on them allegorical meanings. When pushed in a corner the fallibility is admitted; but in practical use men go on treating the Bible as if the dogma of its infallibility had never been questioned.

Where, then, you may ask, is infallible guidance to be found? I answer, you cannot divest yourself of responsibility; *you* must judge, *you* must think, *you* must decide, believing that God's spirit is as surely within you to-day as it ever was within Isaiah or John; and that an inspiration as true, as real as that which ever prophet or apostle reached is yours, if you will. The inspiration of the men of old in awakening the conscience, proves not the possibility only, but the actual reality of a present communion with the Father. When once this is felt, then a criterion of truth is given better far, because more educational in its influence, than any outward infallible standard. 'For God must be better than the best we can

think, juster and purer than our highest thought, more loving, tender, and patient than our compassion's widest reach. Ask, then, when other certainties fail, does this or that view of religious truth most enlarge and deepen my love to God and man? Do I feel more the embrace of a divine Life when I try to believe in everlasting damnation, or when I trust the larger hope? What is most congruous with the essential conditions of thought and springs of feeling within me, a universe of lifeless atoms, or a world that lives and moves and has its being in God?' How do I most worthily think of God—when I think of him as damning little children for a sin which they never committed, but which Adam committed; or when I think of him as loving a little child more tenderly than its mother? Trust your best instincts, your most humane feelings, your finest sense of truth and justice; trust them, rather than the letters of a book, as the voice of God within you. These things are his 'kindly light,' promising to every active, earnest soul, a clearer day, a brighter experience, a higher truth. Keep your face towards the light, in the direction of purer feeling, larger charity, firmer self-control, more faithful loyalty to the duty and the truth you know, for then you will be guided better than by some infallible standard. Why should you be alarmed at following the light of God

within you rather than the words of a book? 'God will not condemn you for any intellectual mistake, but only for the disloyalty of soul which will not follow the guidance of his spirit towards a higher tone of life and a larger-hearted faith. But he who in reverence, sincerity, and self-sacrifice follows the bright shining of God's light, may feel assured that, like a ship with its compass, he carries a guide with him which shall bring him right at last.'[1]

[1] See J. A. Picton's *New Theories and Old Faith* for a masterly discussion of the whole subject.

VI

INSPIRATION

Some years ago I was drawn into a religious discussion with an earnest-minded man who, when I questioned the authority of a text he had quoted, turned round upon me and said: 'But do you believe in the inspiration of the Bible?' 'That,' I answered, 'entirely depends on what you mean by inspiration.' 'Oh, come,' said he, 'don't let us have any quibbling about words. A plain question can have a plain answer. Do you or do you not believe in the inspiration of the Bible?' 'I do not call that a plain question,' I replied; 'and while I have no desire to quibble about words, I must yet decline to palter with words in a double sense. Tell me what you mean by inspiration, and I'll tell you what I believe.' 'Oh,' said he, 'I see what you are at; you want to keep the word and to say you believe in it after you have emptied it of all that it has ever meant. Inspiration means for me that all that is

taught in the Bible came from God, or it means nothing.'

Now this is an illustration of the difficulty a liberal and reforming theologian finds himself in when dealing with religious problems. There are large numbers of men who refuse to believe that words can have any other meaning than that which they have always understood them to bear, or that doctrines can be restated to suit the growing intelligence of the age. Dr. Abbott calls them the Conservatives in Religion—the people who want to keep everything as it is. That is a plain and easy policy, and is no small commendation in a busy age. The same thing is true of the position taken up by sceptics and iconoclasts—the party who would destroy everything, and who say that all these old doctrines and beliefs are false. That also is a plain and easy policy. 'To preserve everything as it is, or to destroy everything root and branch, either of these has the merit of simplicity and ease, appreciable by the laziest of minds in the laziest of humours. But the policy of the Reformers—of the party of Growth and Progress—now involving partial destruction and now partial conservation, is by no means of this plain, simple, easy kind. It obliges them to discriminate, to give reasons for destroying some things and preserving others, and to justify their choice. But to discriminate,

how tedious! And to justify discrimination, how dull for the reader of the justification!'

The orthodox people say, 'You must accept the scriptures in a lump as the Word of God.' Why? Because if you once begin to weigh evidence and discriminate there is no telling where you will stop. But the sceptics say, 'You must reject the Scriptures as the word of God *in toto*.' Why? Because it is impossible to discriminate between one part and another. It is not the first time that the orthodox and the sceptics have joined hands against the Reformers, declaring that the old doctrine of the infallibility of the Bible and the old methods of interpretation are the only reasonable ones. So with regard to the doctrine of the Inspiration of the Bible, both Conservatives and Destructives are alike agreed that it can only mean what they declare it always has meant—that every word of the Bible came from God. But the Reformers side with neither—they discriminate. They deny that all is true or that all is false. They assume as a matter of reasonable expectation that in the texts of the Old and New Testaments there will be found errors which it is the duty of earnest, honest, capable students to discover and remove. The removal or acknowledgment of these errors does not prove that other portions of this great literature are false. The discovery of mistakes

and discrepancies in the gospel narrative does not affect our faith in the life and character there revealed—a life and character to which testimony is borne, not by isolated texts, but by the New Testament as a whole, and by the whole life of the Christian Church. When astronomers by their disputations about the spots on the sun, shall succeed in blotting out the sun itself from the heavens, then, and not till then, will religious reformers apprehend any danger that criticisms of the gospel history will efface Jesus of Nazareth from the affections of mankind.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to frame a logical theory of inspiration which shall adequately express one's belief in the reality and permanence of one of the greatest factors in human life and development. My quarrel with the orthodox doctrine is, not that it asserts too much but that it asserts too little—that it is narrow and local. Confining Inspiration to a book, an age, and a race, and failing to take into account the varied forms under which it manifests itself, the popular orthodox doctrine is entirely inadequate. If we believe in God as the everywhere present, the everywhere quickening spirit, whose is the beautiful grace by which all good is wrought, in whom each man lives his little life from morning until evening, whose light lightens the ages and the nations as they advance from stage to stage

of progress, then we see that Inspiration has been present with humanity through all its history, beaming brightly here, showing dimly there, but never absent from the seeking heart. My doctrine of Inspiration is not a light which makes all lands dark except Palestine, and all books secular except the Bible, but one which casts an interpreting ray into many a pathetic or terrible superstition by which men have felt after God if haply they might find him. It is a doctrine which enables me to hear the same music in many tongues. This is not to deny that in some tongues the music has had a volume, sweetness, and force which have made that particular manifestation of it peculiarly suggestive of a heavenly source. But in *kind* the power is everywhere the same; it only differs in degree. Every good and holy thought, every noble deed, every high endeavour, every pure aspiration, is by and through so much of God as works in humanity; for without him we can do nothing. Inspiration is natural to the human race, and its degree is determined by character and capacity. All men have it; some more, some less, according as their natures are large or small, and according as they open their minds to truth and their hearts to goodness. Touching some words in the Bible, I do not believe them to be inspired at all. But when I come to other portions language is all too

poor to express my sense of the glory and fullness of the inspiration they reveal. From what fountain but God's Spirit could have come any one of a hundred passages from both Old and New Testaments that instantly flash on our minds when we think of what is brightest in religion. At what spring but that of the world's purest, sweetest inspiration could all these men have drunk whose words have sounded down the ages, thrilling the hearts of untold millions as human hearts have never else been thrilled ?

But what do I mean by Inspiration ? Absolute freedom from error ? Not at all, for the treasure is in earthen vessels—the heavenly light shone through human minds and took of their colour and weakness. Do I mean Infallibility ? Not at all, for a man may be divinely moved to act and speak and yet not act and speak with infallibility. As a whole he may be true, but there will be weakness and imperfection here and there. Do I mean that these words are really God's words ? Not at all. They are human words, every one of them, but they were uttered when the hearts and the minds of men were under ennobling influence caught by communion with God.

I do not know any better definition of Inspiration than that given by Mr. Greg in his *Creed of Christendom*—'*That elevation of all the spiritual faculties by the action of God upon the heart, which*

is shared by all devout minds, though in different degrees, and which is consistent with many errors.'

Inspiration is a continuous though variable force in the development and progress of mankind.

There are at least three elements we look for in an inspired utterance, by which we may discriminate the pure gold from baser metal.

1. Spontaneity. By spontaneity I mean that which is free, simple, and original. Anything laboured, anything artificial, anything that is a mere echo or platitude, shuts itself out at once from the inspired. A special note of inspiration is that it is not bound about by rule and custom and creed, but goes back farther than these to the simple feelings of the common heart, to the intuitions and instincts of uncorrupted human nature. It is free. It is also simple. It does not deal with the obscure or temporary phases of thought, nor does it study the trickeries of speech. It speaks the language of the universal human heart. Then it is original, but always *how* it does not know. For genius never knows the secret and cause of its finest products; its best thoughts come to it as surprises of light; and the new truths it gives to the world, it has *discovered*, not invented. I suppose there never was an inspired work yet, the source of which the author could explain. There was an illumination, an impulse, a suggestion from above, and the word

was spoken which burns for ever in letters of fire on the forehead of the morning sky. It is true, these things came not without human effort; but no amount of human effort will account for them or produce them. Every true thinker recognizes that his thoughts are gifts. He works to attain them, but the attainment is not the result of work alone. He has seasons of dryness when all his work is of no avail; and then again, there comes a renewal of life and light, from what far-off sources he knows not, except that whenever he is really original the source is not in himself. Now, there have been men in different ages, and in different parts of the world, gifted spirits, strong in righteousness, and endowed with the insight and the foresight of goodness, who have perceived far more than their fellow-men the open secret of the world; have been more profoundly conscious of the presence and power of God, have lived more habitually in communion with the Father of Spirits, who have spoken with authority—the authority which belongs to wisdom, character, insight, and the subordination of self to the will of God. There has been in these men the sense of suggestion from above. Their truth was not their own, but a discovery, and a gift, a surprise to themselves as well as others. Such a one is not his own: he is as though possessed by a power greater than his will, beyond his control,

vaster than his imagination. This element of spontaneity must be kept in mind if we would gain a true idea of inspiration.

It is not always present in a man; sometimes it leaves him. It is what old Herrick said:—

> It is not every day that I
> Fitted am to prophesy;
> No, but when the spirit fills
> The fantastic panicles,
> Full of fire, then I write
> As the Goddess doth indite.
> Thus, enraged, my lines are hurled,
> Like the sybils through the world:
> Look how next the holy fire
> Either slakes or doth retire:
> So the fancy cools—till when
> That brave spirit comes again.

So also sings a nobler poet, George Herbert. His health had broken down, and he had lost all power of song. But

> Now in age I bud again,
> After so many deaths I live and write;
> Once more I smell the dew and rain,
> And relish versing: O my only light,
> It cannot be
> That I am he
> On whom thy tempests fell all night.

This then is the first note of an inspired soul—spontaneity. He acts and speaks as under an

impulse, which is not always with him, which he did not create, but which is from above.

2. When we say of any man, that he spoke or acted like one inspired, we generally imply that his speech or action was characterized by an exalted moral tone. We talk, indeed, of poetic inspiration; but it jars on the conscience to ascribe *that* to any poetic utterance which is morally bad. Poetry is moral—the better the poetry the higher the moral tone; the finest is like the verse of Saadi, which the angels testified '*met the approbation of Allah in heaven*.' '*In poetry*,' said Goethe, '*only the really great and pure advances us*.' Men of genius have sometimes debased their genius, and written things full of vice and pruriency. But not by their utterances in these moods do they live in the grateful hearts of men, but by quite other utterances, when they rise above such moods into the fine, keen air of moral truth and right. Byron's 'Don Juan' is a work of genius, but of genius which owed much to frequent sips of ardent spirits. It would be utterly incongruous to speak of 'Don Juan' as inspired. But when we read 'Hamlet' or 'Macbeth,' we feel that those plays are full of impulse received from above; for while they were not written to teach this or that moral lesson, they do what is far better, they purify the springs of thought and feeling, out of which morality

flows. In all great poems, as in all great prophetic utterances and in all great pictures, there is this moral exaltation, the ideals of the soul are refined and uplifted. All life is ennobled by Handel's 'Messiah,' by Raphael's 'Madonnas,' by Shakespeare's plays, even as it is by the Book of Psalms.

3. Inspiration is that which is of universal application. If any utterance is only for an age, and local in its interpretation, we do not regard it as inspired. The Psalms, for instance, were mostly suggested by local considerations, the trials, the joys, the experiences of David and others, under peculiar circumstances. But, nevertheless, we feel as we read them that they pass beyond the limits of the local and the individual—they belong to humanity—they are true of human nature and life everywhere. Or take Christ's prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem. It was spoken at Jerusalem about Jerusalem, and in a manner which seemed limited to Jerusalem. But had the prophecy been true only of that city of sorrows, it would never have been regarded as inspired. Whereas Christ's principle was this: that the doom pronounced on Jerusalem was universally applicable, and that it was but a style and specimen of God's judgment everywhere. The judgment comes wherever there is evil grown ripe for judgment, wherever corruption

is complete. And the gathering of the Roman eagles to the carcase is but a specimen of the way in which judgment at last overtakes any city, any country, and any man in whom evil has reached the point where there is no possibility of cure. We who have lived through the last fifty years have seen the eagles gathered together in Naples, in America, in France, in Bulgaria. The Lord's judgment on Jerusalem has been fulfilled many times—it was not simply of local but of universal application.

Look at the Beatitudes, look at the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, look at Paul's noble hymn on charity, look at Isaiah's utterances; all these are everywhere true, and come home to men of all times and all conditions. They touch the human heart with pathos, wherever there is a heart to feel; they tell men what is fairest and noblest and divinest in life, whatsoever their creed and church. They are universal. We say, then, of one who is inspired, that he speaks and acts with spontaneity; that there is in his words and deeds a certain unmistakable moral elevation; and lastly, that his utterances are of universal significance and application.

I do not say that all utterances marked by these three notes of inspiration stand on the same level of beauty and authority. The spark in a

Leyden jar is just as truly a manifestation of electricity as the lightning flash that ploughs its fiery furrow across the midnight sky; but the one is a manifestation on a much more impressive scale than the other. We do not call the electric spark in a Leyden jar a flash of lightning, although it is that in essence; and we do not call all those utterances inspired which while possessing the notes of inspiration, possess them on too small a scale to win the attention. All souls that love and pray and choose between right and wrong are inspired; but between these souls and the great luminous names that shine as stars for ever —Isaiah, Moses, Buddha, John, Socrates—there is the same difference as between the spark of the Leyden jar and a flash of lightning.

And as we say of scenes in nature peculiarly suggestive of all-embracing life that they are Divinely fair, so we say of thoughts and words and teachers and prophets peculiarly instinct with moral grandeur, they are Divinely inspired. So we say of the Bible—it is *the* inspired book of the world; not that it is infallible; not that it is free from error; but that in its utterances we find as we find nowhere else in like fashion, spontaneity, moral exaltation, and universal significance.

But I am still asked, How may I discern between that which is inspired in the Bible and that which is not? To say that I must take it all

or give it all up is as great folly as it would be to say that men must either give up the use of corn as food or consume it husks and all. The question with us is simply to what extent do the utterances of the Bible make the impression of inspiration on the heart? With what degree of power do they quicken conscience, and appeal to what is best within us, and stir up the thought of God? There are two utterances lying side by side in the Bible, one of which indeed touches me to the quick, while the other is to my feeling as dead and powerless as a mummy. May I take the one and leave the other? Why not? I cannot prove to you that both are alike good. No one can. What a man's own heart proves to him as good is the only thing that is good to him. His neighbour may tell him there is light in a certain utterance, warmth, and heavenly food. But if when he goes to it he finds neither light nor warmth nor heavenly food, it will only be hypocrisy in him to pretend otherwise. If he be a humble man he will be slow to say there is nothing inspired in an utterance which others have found helpful; he will not hastily set aside as of no value things which at present are to him as the letters of a foreign alphabet. He will wait; he will investigate; he will try the discriminating power of these notes of inspiration we have been considering. If

the utterance will not stand the application of such a test he may be tolerably sure that the instinctive feeling of his heart has not played him false. Let us take one instance only—the utterance of Jesus as given in Luke xxii. when the disciples disputed among themselves which of them should be greatest in the kingdom. '*And he said unto them* (v. 25) *The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them: and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth. Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*' The first part of this answer presents no difficulty either to the understanding or the heart. It is perfectly in keeping with many other sayings of Jesus; and not only his sayings, but with his whole life and character. We know that the Great Teacher laid most impressive emphasis on the virtues of humility and service. In the washing of his disciples' feet he acted as it were a striking parable which they could never

forget. Once before, when this same dispute had arisen, he rebuked his disciples by means of a little child. '*He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. I am among you as one that serveth.*' But then follow the words, '*And I appoint unto you a kingdom—that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*' What are we to make of such a saying? It is quite incongruous with all the rest. It seems to say, humility is only necessary for a little while; have patience and be submissive now; presently you will have dominion and sit on thrones as judges of the tribes of Israel. But humility and service are virtues everywhere and in all places, in heaven as on earth; and Jesus cannot have meant that humility would some day have its reward by being exchanged for rule and power! On the contrary, he was utterly opposed to such ideas. Is this then an inspired utterance out of Christ's mouth, or has it crept into the narrative from other sources? Let us try it by the three notes of inspiration. No one will say that it was an utterance marked by spontaneity, for it was just an echo of the earthly, worldly kingdom with which the disciples so persistently dazzled and deceived themselves as with a mirage of the desert, and which Jesus so constantly condemned.

He will have nothing to do with a kingdom in which there are thrones and palaces, and again and again he has to remind his disciples that '*the kingdom of God is within you.*' Is it marked by moral exaltation? So far from that, we are let down by these words at once to a lower level of thought and feeling, and an element is introduced which is positively immoral—the promise of future reward and compensation for the suffering of present humiliation. Humility is not a good to be sought for its own sake, carrying its own reward and blessedness with it; but it is to be endured as the stepping-stone to proud dominion. '*Sitting on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*' Is it of universal application? On the contrary, it is narrow, exclusive, local, and Jewish. We know what Jewish ideals and Jewish expectations were at that time. We find these ideals and expectations filling the disciples' minds. We know that they had no place in Jesus' mind. Yet, here we have Jesus reported as reproducing at second hand the commonplaces of Jewish expectation. What shall we conclude but that this is no part of the utterance of Jesus at all, since it is so painfully incongruous with all else he taught and with his whole character? It is one of those Jewish conceptions that have degraded the church and given rise to the fanaticisms of Fifth-

Monarchy men and others—instructive instances of the 'reign of the saints!' And if this habit of discriminating between one utterance and another is called eclecticism, I will remind you of a somewhat rude answer given by Carlyle to a charge of teaching Pantheism—'*I care not if it be Pot-theism if it be true.*'

The great test of the inspiration of any scripture is its power to touch the common heart of the race. David may or may not be the author of the twenty-third Psalm; but all can feel the truth and inspiration of the words, '*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*' I am told that John wrote in his epistle, '*He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love.*' Two questions arise—first, did John say it? and secondly, is it true? Now I do not know whether John said it or not; I have no means of knowing; I have only the tradition in this ancient record. But what of that? Is it true? For me it is no matter whether John said it or one writing in his name; it is equally good and true whoever said it. I believe he did say it; but if you can prove to me that he did not say it, and show me that this verse in his epistle was inserted in the third century, or even in more recent times, and is no part of the Bible at all, it makes no difference. I shall say it is inspired whoever said it. It comes home; it answers to the best that is in me,

it has the notes of spontaneity, of moral exaltation, and of universal significance.

There is, we know, one primitive and sure
Religion pure,
Unchanged in spirit, though its forms and codes
Wear myriad modes—
Contains all creeds within its mighty span,
The love of God displayed in love for man.

VII

MISTAKES IN THE BIBLE

It is told of a great scientific man of our day that when he first visited Rome and went into the Vatican, he sat down before Raphael's 'Transfiguration' and filled three pages of his notebook with its faults. It was the most natural thing in the world for him to do. How should he, a physicist, approve of three figures suspended in the air in defiance of the laws of gravitation? Or what could a zoologist say to an angel outrageously combining in his person the wings of a bird and the legs of man? There were plenty of faults to be found, and he found them!

Yet what an odious and repulsive task for a man to set himself! What a carping mind it reveals that a man should be first of all struck with the defects of a noble work of art, and not with its beauty and grandeur! What an utter Philistine a man must be who could occupy himself in studying, not the genuine poetry and

beautiful colouring of the picture, but its faults! 'Oh, yes,' you would answer impatiently, 'but did you ever see anything more grand in its conception? Look at the power, at the spiritual expression, at the grace; do you not feel the inspiration?'

Now you may think that I am only just such a Philistine in directing your attention to the mistakes in the Bible, as if a man of crooked, captious mind, looking at the sun should only see its spots, or another looking at a great picture should only see its faults. But I should be utterly ashamed of myself if that were my attitude of mind. I have said much in previous lectures to show you my profound sense of the value, the preciousness, the inspiration, and the eternal benediction of the Bible. It is because of my sense of its value that I wish to put reverence for it on a reasonable ground. It is because I want to get it loved and honoured for right reasons that I attack the wrong reasons which are put forward for love and reverence. The old reasons and claims have brought it into discredit, and it is to prove the unsoundness of those views that I direct your attention to the mistakes of the Bible. For, suppose that Raphael's 'Transfiguration' had been elevated by a number of its admirers into a position above all other pictures; suppose we were told that it was the only inspired picture

in the world ; suppose students of art were taught that it gave us the only true scheme of colour and the only right way in which to compose a picture ; and that it was so perfect as to be the model, in all its details, for artists in all time ? Do you not think it might become the duty of some honest spirit to declare that this was not so, and to prove it by a study of the mistakes in the picture ? Would you say such an honest critic was an enemy of Raphael ? You would say he was a friend. Raphael would have been the last man in the world to claim infallibility for his picture, or to set it on a pedestal by itself, apart from all other pictures. If the 'Transfiguration' is to be thus foolishly exalted, and made the only standard of form and colour and composition, then it becomes a sacred duty to show that it has defects. So it is with the Bible, and I need not further apply the parable.

Further, one of the very best helps to a right understanding and true appreciation of the Bible is to convince ourselves of the liability of its writers to mistake.

It is perfectly clear that the Bible writers both could err and did err. Let us take one little instance—quite insignificant, which does not matter in the least, and yet which is typical. There are two accounts in the New Testament of St. Paul's conversion brought about by a voice

from heaven. In one place in the Acts we are told St. Paul's companions heard the voice; but in another place in the Acts we are told they did not hear the voice, but Paul only. That is a plain contradiction, and one or other of the statements is a mistake. It does not matter; it is not of the least importance. But if the Bible is infallible, then it is of great importance; for in order to bolster up the infallibility of the Bible you have to show that there is no contradiction. Need I say that, by a curious twisting of plain words, this has been done, and that the two statements have been 'reconciled,' as it is called. They have been 'reconciled' over and over again, and in various ways; but only by methods which you would be ashamed to apply to any other book—methods which are the opprobrium of Bible criticism, and by which (as Bishop Butler says) anything can be made to mean anything. There is between the two statements a contradiction as clear as can be.[1] The contradiction proves nothing against the good faith of the reporters—it only proves that one of them was mistaken. What does it matter? Nothing at all to me; and takes nothing from the value of the story. But to the Infallibilist it means much, and must be reconciled.

Look at the way in which the plain statement

[1] See *Literature and Dogma*, p. 138.

of the creation of the world in six days is explained away by these 'reconcilers.' Geology put all the believers in the letter of Genesis into frightful confusion. First they denied the conclusions of geology; then they said 'days' did not mean 'days,' but 'ages'; and now, at last, they seem to have agreed that Genesis is the unfortunate Jonah on board the otherwise infallible ship, and must be given up to devouring storms of criticism. Every other part is miraculously inspired, but this may be doubted. What miserable subterfuges are these! What does it matter if Genesis is mistaken? Nothing at all. On a matter of science I should expect it to be mistaken. I can read it with just as great profit as before; but if I believe every word of the Bible to be inspired, why, then I am in a painful dilemma. So far from believing, that if we give up the old theory of the Bible we lose anything of value, I am one of those who believe that the modern conception of the Bible is a distinct and definite gain to the world, and that we are taking stumbling-blocks out of the way of the influence of the Bible by admitting that it contains mistakes. But of this gain I will speak later on. Just now let it suffice to show you that there are mistakes.

Let us take a little bit from the story of the Fall of Man—Adam and Eve—the apple—the serpent

—the garden. There is much in this story that is suggestive ; it is true to human nature ; when I read it I feel it relates my own experience. But is it historically and literally true ? Is it infallibly true in all its details ? Were there ever such things as talking serpents, and trees bearing magical fruit ? When I meet with these things in other religions I know what they are—more or less beautiful myths embodying man's early dreams and guesses as to the origin of evil. Why should I think that in Genesis I am dealing with literal history ? That the serpent should have found a place in early Hebrew annals is perfectly natural when I remember how widely serpent-worship prevails in the East. But we get into hopeless conflict with science and common sense when we forget that this ancient story is a myth and not history. Does any living man believe that the whole tribe of serpents crawl on their bellies as a punishment for an offence committed by one of their number 6000 years ago ? Why, we know that the serpent always did crawl on his belly long before man appeared on the scene. We can prove it, for we can dig the serpent out of the pre-Adamite strata and see that this was his condition thousands of years ere this curse was pronounced. Does any living man believe that death first invaded this world when Adam sinned ? One must be ignorant

of the most elementary facts of science to think so. Death was present here in all its fell power long previous to Adam; here are the fossils to prove it. And yet people go on telling us that if Adam had not sinned man would never have died. Does any living man believe that thorns and thistles first appeared on the earth in consequence of the curse? So far from that part of the curse being true—'*thorns also and thistles it shall bring forth to thee*'—we know that the queen of flowers, the rose in our gardens, comes from a thorn, and that instead of the earth yielding thistles to man's labour, it does nothing of the sort, but brings forth whatever fair flower, and healing herb, and life-giving plant we sow therein, according to the laws of nature, which are the laws of God.

Then as to the curse on labour. What hardy, brave, diligent Englishman feels labour to be a curse? He knows that it is one of his greatest blessings and rids him at once of three great evils, poverty, vice, and ennui. It is by labour we enter into fellowship with God, sharing the joys of creation. '*My father worketh hitherto, and I work.*'

Labour's strong and merry children,
Comrades of the rising sun,
Let us sing a song together
Now our toil is done.

No desponding, no repining!
Leisure must by toil be bought;
Never yet was good accomplished
Without hand and thought.

Even God's own holy labour
Framed the air, the stars, the sun,
Built our earth on deep foundations,
And the world was won.

Every part of this fivefold curse, if taken literally, is proved to be contrary to fact and experience. The author is speaking according to the lights and conceptions of his age. But he is mistaken. What then? Is not the story of the Fall still true to human nature? Is it not in this way man always wakes up to moral consciousness and acquires his sense of right and wrong? The story of Adam is the story of the moral experience of every human being. Childhood is the Garden of Eden in which we all have wandered, happy, innocent, free. But at last comes the day when we consciously choose the evil instead of the good, and never again can it be with us as it was before; never again can we return to that Eden, our unthinking innocence. Yet it is a higher life we now begin to live, and the Fall is a giant step in human progress. But what if the details are fanciful and mistaken? Why, we ought to be thankful that on the very first page of the Bible there is something which plainly warns us against literalism.

In the Book of Leviticus we are told that the hare is unclean because it cheweth the cud but divideth not the hoof. The fact is, the hare does not chew the cud and the writer was in error. It is not, however, of the least consequence, unless I hold a theory of the Bible which compels me to believe that every word is literally true.

Take two or three figures concerning the Israelites and their departure from Egypt. It is said that seventy souls—Jacob's family and household—went down into Egypt, but at the end of 170 years they had increased to three millions—an utterly incredible story. And of these three millions it is said that there were six hundred thousand fighting men. Now, consider the enormous commissariat difficulties of marching these three millions of people out of Egypt. The moving city, twelve miles square, the two hundred thousand tents, the one hundred and fifty thousand oxen, the two million sheep, the three million people, all marched out of Egypt in a single night, all supported in the desert for forty years. We are quite sure that, to say the least of it, the numbers here are woefully inaccurate.

I pass over many things to notice only a command given that on the capture of a certain city all the men and all the married women and all the little children should be put to death, as likewise all the cattle, but that the young

unmarried women should be saved alive, and distributed among the soldiers and the priesthood.[1] Do you think God commanded that? Do you not think there is a mistake when it says God did command it?

Let no one say I am attacking the Pentateuch—I am simply telling you the truth about it. I am directly and indirectly attacking a theory held concerning it which the Pentateuch neither asserts, implies, nor endorses. And I wish to say further, that when we take a rational, natural view of the origin of this book, we find nothing which need surprise us, nothing which calls for apology. Its views of the creation of the world, of the nature of God, of the history of man, of the origin of evil, are similar to those entertained by other peoples in the same relative grade of civilization. They are simply the views of God and man and the world through which any people in its development naturally passes, but in which no people ought to stay. That is the point. When we go to the Bible without any theory of miraculous inspiration we find what we should expect. It is all perfectly natural, and we see in the beginning of the Bible that beginning of morality and of religion which is in the nature of things, and which is the starting-point from which the Bible moves upward and onward to something better.

[1] *Numbers* xxxi.

But, on the other hand, consider the difficulties that harass our every step if we hold to the theory that every word is true and miraculously inspired. We are compelled perpetually to the disingenuous twisting and turning of texts, in order to bring Genesis into harmony with the facts of science. We are compelled practically to be dishonest with ourselves in regard to the science and the inspiration of the Pentateuch. We are compelled to believe that the inferior morality of the Pentateuch—a morality which permitted slavery, polygamy, and revenge—is the eternal right and wrong of God. We are compelled to perpetually apologize for God: to explain to men how it could be possible and just for one who is the loving, tender Father of men to-day, to have ordered the wholesale cruel slaughter of defenceless women, innocent children, helpless cattle, reserving the young women for the lust of the soldiers.

It is not something to mourn over but to be grateful for that we need no longer attempt these excuses and justifications, but can say, in all these the Bible is mistaken. Such a confession puts everything right, enables us to use our brains, to read the Bible naturally, to see with a new interest how the race has been educated, and brought on from one standard of conduct and belief to another.

Pass on to the New Testament, and out of many

instances that might be mentioned, notice only two grave mistakes in its pages. Look at the genealogies given by Matthew and Luke to prove that Jesus was descended from the royal race, the house of David. Now notice. Both Matthew and Luke tell the story of the miraculous conception. They both tell us that Jesus was the son of Mary without any human father. Yet they both take pains to give us the genealogy of Joseph. But if Joseph was not the father of Jesus, what does his genealogy prove? It no more proves that he was descended from David or Abraham than it proves I am. Jesus was claimed to have descended from David because a man who was not his father descended from David! Again, the two genealogies do not agree. Matthew and Luke differ from each other over about forty names. In fact, the genealogy given by Luke is wholly different from that given by Matthew, and the most desperate efforts of divines have been unable to effect even the semblance of a reconciliation. Not only does Matthew give twenty-six generations between David and Joseph when Luke has forty-one, but they trace the descent through an entirely different line of ancestry. According to Matthew, the father of Joseph was named Jacob; according to Luke, Heli. Clearly they cannot both be right, although many ingenious hypotheses have been

invented to explain and harmonize these singular discrepancies. The most favourite of these assumes that one is the genealogy of Joseph and the other of Mary—a convenient idea, but entirely gratuitous, and positively contradicted by the language of the text. Either Matthew or Luke is mistaken. Yet, what does it matter? Nothing.

Once more. The Apostles unanimously and clearly taught and believed that the end of the world was at hand, and would arrive in the life-time of the existing generation. On this point there appears to have been no difference of opinion amongst them. People try to explain their words away, but their meaning is so palpable that no effort can confuse our perception of it. '*The time is short.*' '*The Lord is at hand.*' '*The end of all things is at hand.*' '*Little children, it is the last time.*' '*Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all die, but we shall all be changed.*' '*This we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive unto the coming of our Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep.*' '*For the dead in Christ shall rise first, and these which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.*' Nothing can obscure or explain away the simple, straightforward meaning of all these words. What then? History has shown that Paul and his

fellow-Apostles were mistaken in their notion of what was going to happen. But we can easily see how this belief coloured all their teaching. The firm and living faith that a few years would bring their Lord in his glory, and the fearful termination of all earthly things—'*when the heavens should be gathered together as a scroll, and the elements melt with fervent heat*'—and that many among them should be still alive, and should witness these awful occurrences with human eyes, and should join their glorified Master in heaven without passing through the gates of death, could not exist in their minds without producing not only a profound contempt for all the pomps and distinctions of the world, but an utter carelessness for the future interests of mankind; nor without making them indifferent to all political questions and to the reform of great abuses in social life. What mattered slavery if the world was soon to come to an end? What interest could they feel in the Imperial system and the reform of government when the King of Kings was daily expected to assert his dominion? 'If the world and all its mighty and far-stretching interests—if the earth and its infinite and varying beauties—were indeed to be finally swept away in the time and presence of the existing actors in the busy scene of life, where was the use of forming any new ties of kindred or affection which must

terminate so suddenly and so soon? Why give a moment's thought to the arts which embellish life, the sciences which prolong it, or the knowledge which enriches and dignifies its course? Marriage, children, wealth, power, philosophy, slavery, tyranny—what were they to men who knew that ten or twenty years would transplant, not only themselves but the whole race of man to a world where all would be forgotten? And this conviction teeming with immense and dangerous consequences, and held by all the Apostles, was, we know, mistaken and unfounded. There was scarcely any doctrine which they held so undoubtingly, or preached so dogmatically as this, and yet they were in total error.'[1]

If, then, they were so misinformed and mistaken in a matter so important, what confidence have we that they never made a mistake about any other question?

On the other hand, I aver that it is an immense gain to look at the Bible with reasonable eyes, and to frankly admit that there are mistakes in it. We are no longer under obligations to defend what is intellectually, and it may be morally, indefensible. We are no longer compelled to apologize for, or explain away and harmonize, the contradictions of the Bible. The man who would be a Christian, but who would like to keep

[1] Greg's *Creed of Christendom.*

his common sense if he may, says 'But must I believe in talking serpents, and talking asses, and the Tower of Babel? What about the conquest of Canaan, and these slaughterings commanded by God? What about the shaking down of a city wall at the sound of a number of rams' horns blown by the people? or the staying of the sun in the heavens until the battle can be finished? What about the genealogies of the New Testament? Must I believe that Jesus drowned two thousand swine, or blasted a fig-tree with a word? What about the prophecies of the immediate end of the world?' I speak of these things to indicate the kind of intellectual and moral burden that rests upon a man who attaches Christianity to the old theory of the Bible. All these things have to be defended or explained, and they cannot be defended in the court of reason, nor explained without a process of twisting plain words out of their meaning, which is discreditable both to the intellect and to the conscience. It is an unspeakable gain to be able to throw off all this burden, which neither the past nor the present has been able to bear, and to accept that which is true because it is true, feeling under no obligation to shut our eyes or to stop our thinking. We should be glad to know the truth about the Bible, and to be free from a theory of its literal, historical accuracy, which breaks down on every

page of it. It is a great gain that we no longer refuse to recognize discrepancies, and no longer make miracles the primary evidence of Christianity, as was generally done by writers of the last century. No one can read Stanley's *Lectures on the Jewish Church*, and feel that he has missed anything of moral or spiritual value because the miracles have vanished from the pages. You may eliminate the miracles from the Gospel narrative and leave untouched its religious power. We do not weaken the force and inspiration of the Bible by admitting its mistakes: that which remains—its spiritual insight and sympathy; its record of men's search for God and cry to him; its story of the religious development of a race specially endowed with the sense of God; its unique fulfilment of all moral aspiration in Jesus Christ, these stand out all the more clearly when once we disentangle them from theories, legends, events, which in any other history we should promptly set aside as of no account.

VIII

EVOLUTION IN THE BIBLE—GOD

A GREAT many people have a theory of the Bible which puts both them and it into a painful position. They think that all its parts are of equal value, and that its ideas and doctrines are all on the same level of wisdom and authority. They read Judges as they read St. John, and think it is equally profitable for instruction: they suppose that the teaching of Moses about God, and man, and morality, is on the same level as that of St. Paul, and furnishes an equally safe guide for nineteenth century footsteps as for the Jews in their desert-wanderings. Yet they cannot help seeing that the conduct of Abraham and Jacob, Samson and David, and many another, would in these days be met with the sternest reprobation; while many of the precepts of the Pentateuch, if now proposed as the basis of legislation, would be regarded as both immoral and inhuman. To square the Pentateuch

with modern conceptions of theology and morality, they have to make the most painful efforts to explain away the plain meaning of the ancient narrative, by putting a strain upon words they will not bear. Disgraceful bits of history are to be understood in a spiritual sense; awkward facts in the lives of Patriarch and Judge are allegorized away, and in a sense the poet never intended, 'things are not what they seem.' Now all this would be got rid of if men once grasped the idea that we have in the Bible—teaching, not all on one level but on an ascending scale; history, not of one religion but of many religions—or, rather, of religion in its various stages of growth and development. What we have in the Bible is a more vivid and impressive picture than can be found anywhere else in literature of the evolution of religion and morals on a large scale. The Books of the Bible range over a period of 1200 years, and during that long time we see a people rising out of low and barbarous conceptions of God and morality, advancing by gradual growth to such lofty and spiritual conceptions as were taught by Jesus. In the earlier stages, therefore, we have laws and doctrines which are now set aside, and which, while suited to the age in which they came to birth, are totally unsuited for us.

No one recognized this more clearly than Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount, how often does he

use the phrase, '*Ye have heard that it was said by them of olden time*'—but '*I say unto you*,' setting aside the old morality for something nobler. Once the Pharisees came to him, trying to catch and puzzle him with one of the old Mosaic regulations about divorce. It was a regulation suited for the childhood of man, but which man had now outgrown. Christ answered, '*for the hardness of your hearts Moses wrote the precept*,'[1] that is, because ye were too ignorant, too childish, and too low down in the scale for anything else. What Moses commanded was not absolutely good it was only relatively good; it was as much as men then—in that stage of civilization—were able to bear and understand. If we once recognize the progressive element in the Bible, we shall be relieved of many difficulties about the Bible; and, looking at it with freer and more intelligent eyes, shall see it to be a more wonderful book than ever, by reason that it is *not* all of a piece, *not* all of equal value, but follows the natural order of growth that the human being follows—a growth from infancy to childhood, from childhood to youth, from youth to manhood. But are you going to feed the man with the pap-boats of infancy? Would you not expect to find a greater wisdom at the end than at the beginning of a long period of growth?

[1] *Mark* x. 5.

The fact is, in the Bible there is not one standard, but many standards. There is a progressive theology and a progressive morality throughout. In the beginning there are primitive and childish views of God, which we cannot now endorse without irreverence.

The earlier writers of the Old Testament represent God as walking, talking, having bodily form; wrestling with one patriarch; eating veal and cakes with another; contending, and for a time in vain, with the magic of other gods; smelling the smell of meat on the fire; getting angry; being jealous; repenting; sanctioning fraud; committing cruelty; and exhibiting almost every passion and imperfection of man. Many of these conceptions are the simple and fitting conceptions of a simple, childish age; but as we advance this passes away; the thought of God becomes slowly purified, ennobled, and uplifted; through Judges, through Psalmists, through Prophets, the development goes on, until we have the beautiful conceptions which we find in the New Testament—i.e., God as Love; God as Spirit; God as Light; God as a Father. The twilight is gone, the perfect day is here.

We think none the worse of astronomy because it had its first beginnings in the superstitions of astrology; we value chemistry none the less because it arose out of that ignorance and groping

in the dark called alchemy. So the religion we profess is none the less elevated and spiritual because it had its beginning in much that was ignorant and superstitious. The true idea of God is gradually disclosed. Man thinks of God first of all as very much like himself, as a magnified man who walks in a garden, who comes down from the sky to spy out what people are doing, as though he did not know; as having a human form and attributes; as being easily provoked to anger—in one word, man's conception is anthropomorphic. God is just a magnified man; not, however, the man of the nineteenth century, a magnified General Gordon, or David Livingstone, or Dr. Arnold, but a magnified man of the early centuries —a magnified Caractacus, or a magnified Romulus, or a magnified Abraham, with all the defects, the passions, and the ignorance of such characters. What a long way do we travel from such crude conceptions of God to the conceptions we find in John and Paul. The distance between the two is immense, yet the one passed by a slow process of growth into the other.

1. Look at this first of all as depicted in the various names for God we find in the Bible. For names are not mere labels or numbers by which you may know A from B. Names in all primitive ages are descriptive: they tell us what a man or a thing is. Man, for instance, means

'one who thinks'; husband is 'the house-band'; the earth is that which is 'eared,' the old Saxon name for ploughing; daughter is 'the milking-maid'; father means 'protector'; sister, 'one who pleases or consoles.' Thus did the old words carry with them moral or natural meanings. So in the Bible the names given to its heroes are nearly always descriptive either of their character or their exploits or the hopes aroused by their appearance. Look at Abraham; his name passes through three stages, each of which tells us something. First he is *Ab*, the father; then he is *Abram*, the lofty father; then he becomes *Abraham*, the father of multitudes. *Jacob* is the 'supplanter,' who becomes transformed into *Israel*, 'a Prince of God.' *David* is 'the darling,' and so forth.

Now look only at three of the names for God we find in the Bible.

In the Pentateuch there are two distinct accounts of creation, and two distinct sources of information blended together, but often contradicting each other, yet which we can easily unravel, by noting that in each case a different name for God is employed. In the first account of creation given in Genesis i.–ii. 4, God is called *Eloah*; but in the second account given in Genesis ii. 4, to the end of chapter iii, God is called *Jehovah*.

I need not pause now to point out the dis-

crepancies between these two narratives; I only want you to notice that there are two narratives, and that we are dealing here with two sets of documents. But in many places in the Pentateuch this difference is to be observed, so that we have come to speak of Elohistic and Jehovistic documents.

Now what does the first name for God mean? Eloah simply means 'the strong one.' It comes from the root *el*, the strong, and was man's first name for God. It is from the same root which expresses in Hebrew the strength of the mighty forest bull, the strength of the ancient oak. It is the same word as 'Allah,' which, in the religion of Islam, has produced a profound sense of the presence of God. 'Allah,' God is great, is the cry of the Moslem. It is an idea which may lend itself to many errors, but it is true and helpful as far as it goes. You may find traces of it in various Bible names. Thus, Beth-*el* means the stones of God, and Peni-*el*, the face of God; so that we find not only the legendary Adam, but Jacob, 2000 years later, speaking of God as 'the strong one.' It was not a very exalted conception of God, but it was a very natural one for man in his infancy. That which first produces an impression of awe upon his mind is the might and majesty of the forces around him—the storms, the wind, the lightning, the seasons, the scorching

sun, the blight, the pestilence, the tornado, the awful sea, the towering mountains, the rushing rivers. Everywhere he sees the evidence of some wondrous energy, some mighty force, which is resistless, and against which he can do nothing; and he falls down and worships it as strength.

But from this true, although inadequate idea, we pass on to another—the idea which is embodied in the second name—the name revealed to Moses —'*I am that I am*'—or Jehovah. Here is a great and important advance. Jehovah means not strength, but Eternal, that which was, that which is. This is the name which expresses to us the self-existence, the unchangeable simplicity and unity of God which is not to be represented in any outward form.

The strength, the power of God, might be and was set forth in all the different shapes of sacred stones, sacred tree, and sacred animal. But the Eternal is not these. Eternity, whatever it be, is something deeper and vaster. It cannot be represented by a graven image. It is the Unchangeable, the Invisible. It is not a magnified man with parts and passions; it is spiritual; it forbids idolatry.

I pass over other names which, as their thoughts enlarged, the Jews came to give to God—Jehovah-Sabaoth—that is, the Eternal—who is the leader of the hosts of heaven and the hosts

of earth, the Ruler of principalities, powers, and dominions; and later on, the Holy One. I pass over those names of God which we find in the writings of the final oracle of the Apostolic age, whose title and whose date may be fairly questioned, but whose profound insight into these problems cannot be denied. St. John has not told us that God is a being of three persons, nor that he is a being with personality at all. In St. John's definition we are told that God is spirit, and that God is Light; but most emphatically and repeatedly that God is Love. It is a definition which has never been reasserted in any creed; but it is a definition which is worth more to the human heart than all the creeds put together. I leave all these to notice only the name by which Jesus bade us think and speak of God, and which he invariably used—the Father. From one point of view it may be said that Jesus came into the world to give men this new name for God. To proclaim a new name was his mission. '*I made known unto them thy name.*'[1] '*Our Father which art in heaven: hallowed be thy name.*'[2] The Father—our Father. That is the great name of the Supreme, a name as much greater than the Strong, or the Eternal, or the Lord of Hosts, as he who revealed it is greater than Abraham, Moses, or David. The name of God to us is 'Our Father';

[1] *John* xvii. 26. [2] *Matthew* vi. 9.

the love, compassion, far-reaching watchful care of a Father is the figure which best brings before us the love, compassion, and watchful care of the Ruler of the Universe.

Here, then, in the names used at various stages to represent the thought of God, we see a wonderful growth and development.

2. Notice the same law of growth leading up to the monotheistic idea. We are accustomed to think of the Jews as separated from the idolatrous nations around them by their worship of the one only God, and we quote the first of the ten commandments, '*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*' But the ten commandments, even if we assign them to Moses, were of late date in the history of man, and even they did not announce the truth of monotheism—one only God, '*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*' Then there were other gods, but they were not to be Israel's gods; there were other gods, but none of them *before* Israel's God. Israel's God was the first and the greatest of the gods; but for a long time in Bible history there is no denial of the reality of other deities. The God of the Hebrews was in the first instance the God of the *Hebrews*, not the God of any other people: stronger and wiser than other gods; but in all senses a local god, the god of a tribe, and not the god of the whole earth. Thus in Exodus

we have the passage, '*Who is like unto thee, Jehovah, among the gods?*' In the first Book of the Kings we read, '*There is no god like thee in heaven above or on earth beneath.*' When Moses, by Jehovah's command, repairs to Pharaoh, to demand that he let Israel go, he does not represent God as the one sole God of the universe, he simply represents him as the '*God of the Hebrews.*' Let us stand for a moment with Moses in the presence of Pharaoh, and see him holding his magical rod in his hand. When Aaron flings down his rod and it turns into a serpent, the priests of Pharaoh's religion throw down theirs and they turn into serpents also. Aaron possesses no power which is not common to the other magicians, except that the God of Moses and Aaron is a greater God than the god of Pharaoh. Moses did not doubt the existence and the reality of the gods of Egypt. There is no trace of that whatever. Until after the time of David, there was no question as to the reality of the existence of the divinities of the surrounding nations. Moloch, Dagon, and Astarte were real gods. The only point was that Jehovah, the God of Israel, was above all the others, a greater god than the rest. That was proved satisfactorily to Moses and Aaron when their serpent ate up all the other serpents. Their magicians could turn their rods into serpents, but only one serpent

could devour the others. This showed the supremacy of the God of Moses. When a king went to war, it was not simply a war between two peoples and their kings, but it was a war between their gods also; for Dagon on the one side and Jehovah on the other, were supposed to fight just as much as the Philistine king and the king of Israel. Precisely the same is true in Homer's Iliad. There the Greeks and Trojans were fighting in the plains; but the air was thick with the gods of Olympus, urging on and inspiring the champions, guiding the dart of one and the spear of another, overthrowing the horses and chariots. We find these ideas throughout ancient times, and they are as apparent in the early parts of the Bible as in the Greek and Roman mythologies.

All along in the history of the Jews we hear of their continual relapse into idolatry, but it was not until after David that the idea dawned upon them that the gods of the nations round about were *no gods* at all. The God whom Moses serves is the God of a family and a tribe—'the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' He is not asserted to be the *only* God: the power of rival deities is not denied until we get to such writers as Micah and Isaiah. Some of the very texts which are now quoted to prove a monotheistic belief on the part of the Jews, in reality prove just the opposite. Jehovah is '*King of Kings*' and '*Lord*

of Lords'—'*a great King and above all gods.*' The lords and gods over whom he is supreme must exist, or such words would mean nothing. The conception of the one living and true God was a plant of slow and gradual growth in the Hebrew mind. As civilization advanced and men rose to higher and nobler levels of life, so their thoughts of God were purified and enlarged; and in Isaiah and the later prophets we have the truth of monotheism as clearly revealed as in the Pentateuch it is unknown.

3. Notice the same law of growth in men's conceptions of the character of God; in the development of the moral and spiritual nature of God.

It is not to be supposed that the childhood of the race will have the same thoughts of the Supreme Moral Perfection as we cherish who live in its manhood. The ideas of gentleness, of patience, of universal love, of unswerving beneficence, of untiring goodness, are impossible to men in a low state of development. They think of God only as they can. He is strong, but he is vindictive; he gets his way by unscrupulous means; he has favourites; he is jealous; he is only partially informed of what is going on in the earth; he is just the imperfect Being which man imagines when he is groping his way out of darkness into dawn. This is what we find God to be in the earlier chapters of Bible

history, and no one need be shocked to discover what is eminently natural in the Bible record of man's religious development. It is only because of the stupid way in which men will regard all the parts of the Bible as of equal value, and speak of the God of Adam, and Abraham, and Moses as if he were the same as the God of Paul, Peter, and John, that it is necessary to point out in particular cases how far the earlier conception of God falls short of moral perfection.

Take the morality involved in the story of the Fall of man. Take the God who creates this man and woman, and puts them into the garden without the slightest particle of experience, without knowing that they had an enemy in all the universe, and then makes not only their own fate, but the fate of the world depend on one ignorant act, he himself knowing that the serpent was cunning, yet giving them not a hint. Such a thought of God is only possible in a rude age. Look at the Exodus and see what kind of a God deals with Pharaoh and with the children of Israel. He declares beforehand to Moses that he is going to harden Pharaoh's heart, so that, in spite of everything Moses may do, Pharaoh will not consent to the departure of the Jews. He takes upon himself the responsibility of Pharaoh's future conduct. He distinctly endorses lying at the outset. He tells Moses to say that they

want to go three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to their God. If they can only get three days' start by a trick, all will go well. Moses is not to say anything about running away. God tells him to deceive Pharaoh and to get his consent under false pretences. And for what Pharaoh does, and cannot help doing because the Lord has hardened his heart, he punishes the whole land of Egypt, men, women, and children. Not only that, but he punishes with disease and death all the poor innocent cattle throughout the whole realm—punishes them for what he has made one man do.

A little later on we read that God ordered the Jewish people, when they were ready to start on their journey, to borrow every valuable thing they could of their neighbours, and carry it off. Thus they are commanded to rob as well as lie.

Of course, you will say, Moses was mistaken when he spoke of these commandments as coming from God. He was really speaking in his own name, and applying to that critical state of affairs the stratagems and the morality natural to his age. Most true: but what then becomes of the infallibility of the Bible, and the equal value of all its parts? Besides, what we have to consider is this—that the Jews saw no incongruity in attributing such commandments to God; it fitted in with their conceptions of God, and they were not shocked, as we should be,

by such orders given forth as Divine injunctions. Look at the injunction in Exodus xxii. '*Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.*' This commandment given by Moses, in the name of God, has resulted in the hanging, burning, stoning, killing, and torturing, in one way and another, of hundreds and thousands of innocent persons. Now we know that there is no such thing as witchcraft, and yet we are shown God believing in it.

To us, all these are morally degrading conceptions of God, according to which he is not perfectly just, true, and good. But they are conceptions natural to such a people as the Jews, in their then state of civilization; they could think no other. The point is, that they did not stay there, and the Bible does not stay there. Always this people, with their deep religious instinct, are feeling their way to something better; never are they satisfied; the ideal is enlarged, purified, uplifted, and their thoughts are widened with the process of the suns. Mingled with their degrading views of God, there are other views of God in the Pentateuch which are grand, noble, and sublime, and a great deal that the highest and most lovely civilization in any age need not be ashamed of or apologize for. But we must discriminate. We must not suppose that every time the writer says, 'Thus saith the Lord,' that the Lord really did speak

thus;[1] and we must learn to notice the brighter and darker thoughts of God contending with each other for the pre-eminence, until the brighter prevail, so that in the prophets all these degrading views of God disappear. The Jewish race has this glory, that we see in it the slow but sure development of the God-consciousness which is in all men, culminating at last in the man Christ Jesus. Mark the growth, notice the immense distance between such passages as these :—

1. '*And Noah offered burnt-offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour, and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground for man's sake.*' And—

2. '*Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it. Thou delightest not in burnt-offering.*'

Or between these :

1. '*Ye shall offer a burnt-offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord, thirteen bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs.*' And

2. '*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*'

[1] No scholar at this time of day would construe such phrases as 'Thus saith the Lord,' and 'The word of the Lord came,' as implying a supernatural revelation. Not in Palestine only but in all Eastern nations it was the custom to attribute any specially good impulse directly to a supernatural source.

Or these :

1. '*The Lord repented him that he had made man.*' And—

2. '*The strength of Israel is not a man that he should repent.*'

Or these :

1. '*And the Lord said unto Moses, Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver and jewels of gold. And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. And they spoiled the Egyptians.*' And—

2. '*Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.*'

What totally different conceptions of God are here set forth ; what a progress has been made in the course of a few centuries from the God of Samuel, who ordered the infants and sucklings to be cruelly slaughtered, and the God of Jesus, who said '*Suffer the little ones to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*' Think of the God of Moses, to whom the smell of roasting flesh is a sweet savour, and the God of Micah, who proclaims, '*What doth the Lord require of thee, O man, but to do justly,*

to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'

How thankfully we trace the line of development, and how much more rich and full of meaning is the Bible when we read it in this light, and see God working and waiting through the ages to teach men the truth about himself as they were able to bear it. The history revealed in the Bible is the history of the growing purity and lustre with which the thought of God has beamed forth on human souls. Patriarchs who were possessed with a sense of the unseen; lawgivers who strove according to their light to rule the earth by a better order than men had yet known; prophets who heard in stillness and spoke in thunder; psalmists whose words tremble with the consciousness of the majesty and mercy of God—all had their part in educating the perceptions of the human race, till at last men had advanced to the position when they could take in the teaching of Christ about a Father in heaven. The partial and fallible conceptions of God in the earlier parts of the Bible belong to its essence; they illustrate the history of the evolution of the idea of God. But from the earliest times there was a yearning, a hungering, a looking forward to something better; the dawn slowly broadens into day, and we have finally the perfect idea of God given to us by Jesus, the Impersonation of Divine Grace and Truth.

IX

EVOLUTION IN THE BIBLE—MAN

When you catch a ray of light in a prism it breaks up into various parts, and the colours of the rainbow are seen lying side by side, melting into each other. 'The burnished flaming arch' that o'erstretches the whole heaven, is perfectly set forth in your three-sided strip of glass, no larger than a man's finger. A single tiny beam of sunshine, caught in this manner, illustrates and explains the vast and perfect rainbow spanning the sky from north to south.

In the same way, the life of any single human being contains within itself a history in miniature of the human race as a whole. The stages in the progress of the individual: the ignorance, innocence, and helplessness of childhood; the beauty, dash, and enthusiasm of youth; the patience, wisdom, endurance, and power of manhood, are a perfect picture of the development of mankind.

The old theology represents man as having been created perfect, from which condition he fell away. The new theology, truer to the facts of nature, and reading the Bible with more enlightened eyes, represents man in his first appearance on the earth as an infant, ignorant, innocent, helpless, and from that point moving *towards* perfection. Man begins where the infant begins, at zero, at nothing, and his history is a constant progress towards a better state. The race has its childhood, its youth, and its manhood; and if I wanted to symbolize these three stages of growth in three Bible names, I should select Adam, David, and St. Paul. In Adam you have the race in its infancy; in David, its beautiful, passionate, wayward youth; in St. Paul, its wise, strong, and disciplined manhood.

One immense advantage which follows from reading the Bible in the same way we read any other book is this, that its earlier portions are seen to be eminently natural and fall in with what we know from other quarters about the infancy of the human race. The old myth of a perfect moral condition and a full-orbed manhood, followed by a gigantic fall which brought ruin upon the race, is seen to be a later theological conception forced upon the narrative. If we take the story as it stands, it is all of a piece with what anthropology has told us about primitive man; and as

we follow the story in the Bible of man's development, it harmonizes with the record outside its pages.

1. I want you to notice that we have in the Bible the story of man's growth in civilization.

A great many people are alarmed as to the conclusions of Mr. Darwin and others on the origin of man. But, however far back we may trace man's physical nature, from whatever earlier forms it may be thought possible to derive the bodily frame which we possess, no one can go farther back or deeper down than the statement in Genesis, '*The Lord God made man out of the dust of the earth*.'[1] It is thought man is humiliated by the supposition of his development from some lower form of animal life. But he cannot have a humbler origin than the dust of the earth. '*The first man is of the earth, earthy*'[2] says the great Apostle, and so says the latest voice of science.

The words '*Adam*,' and '*homo*,' and '*humanus*,' all alike mean 'out of the ground.' The ladder on which man climbs to heaven has its first rung on the earth. We begin low down in the scale, and from that we move away to the intelligent, the moral, and the spiritual.

It is true that on the first page of the Bible we have a declaration about man which is one of the divinest things ever spoken, '*God made man*

[1] *Genesis* ii. 7. [2] 1 *Cor.* xv. 47.

in his own image.'[1] There is nothing in all Scripture more beautiful, more inspiring, or more suggestive than this. It is the secret of all that is noble in human nature and in human history. But, like other great truths announced in ancient times, the world was not ready for it. It was a seed which sank into the ground and remained hidden there until Christ came and quickened it into vitality. We have not yet grasped its full meaning; not yet do we understand all that is meant by the image of God; not yet has human nature developed to the full its divine capabilities. We have to look for the meaning of this statement, not to man as he was first made, but to man as he came to the flower of perfect manhood in Jesus Christ. It is my faith that the image of God was there in man from the beginning; but it was there as the oak is in the acorn, so that if you would know what the oak is, you must not look at the acorn at all, but at what it becomes after centuries of growth.

Further, this glorious revelation about man soon drops out of sight. It is only found in the first of the two accounts of creation given in Genesis.

The second account, beginning at Genesis ii. 4, says nothing of man made in God's image; we are on a lower level of inspiration, and listening to a narrator who sees things from another point of view—the point of view, not of the prophet

[1] *Genesis* i. 27.

who discerns what this creature, man, is capable of, but of the historian who sees what he is.

And what is he? Modern science tells us that the first man was not at all that perfect, exalted moral being depicted in Milton's 'Paradise Lost,' but was originally an ignorant, naked savage. That was his first state, and that is how he is presented to view in Genesis. The life of Adam was the life of a South Sea islander in the Pacific. At its best it is a life sweet and idle, in a land so fruitful that no labour is required for its support, and a climate so genial that no provision is necessary for shelter. It suits the islanders, who are mostly pulp, morally and mentally—the human jelly-fish, without muscle or fibre; but you and I would sicken of it in a week, as we would sicken of a week with Adam in the garden of Eden. As he is painted for us in Genesis, Adam was a creature of small intelligence and feeble will, having no moral strength, succumbing to the first temptation, worshipping a fetish in the form of a serpent, as they do in the South Sea islands to-day. What is called his fall was his waking up to discern for the first time between good and evil; and, so far from a fall, was a giant step in human progress. His expulsion from the garden to get his bread by the sweat of his brow, so far from a punishment, was a benediction, since only by having to battle with nature, and

endure the stern necessity of hunger, could he ever emerge from the ignorance and helplessness of his first savage state.

From that point the Bible shows us man advancing from stage to stage of civilization. After the first naked, helpless, savage state, we are shown man as a hunter, capturing and slaying animals, and living largely by the chase. '*Nimrod was a mighty hunter before the Lord.*'[1] Then, from chasing wild animals, came the taming of certain animals for domestic use—sheep and goats, oxen and camels. Men from hunters became shepherds. We have the two stages or two employments in conflict with each other in Esau and Jacob. Esau was the hunter, Jacob was the shepherd; and the shepherd represented a more advanced stage of civilization than the hunter. But the shepherd's was a wandering life, without any other house than the moving tent, and was not sufficient for man's wants. There grew up out of it the arts of agriculture: men learned to plant and reap, and we read of '*seed-time and harvest.*'[2] This represented a still more advanced civilization; and it has been suggested that the story of Cain and Abel is just a parable of the conflict between the wandering shepherd and the settled husbandman, the nomad tribes and the agriculturists.

[1] *Genesis* x. 9. [2] *Genesis* viii. 22.

We have a hint given us as to the invention of ironwork and music by the mythical children of the mythical Cain: '*Tubal-Cain, a sharpener of every instrument of copper and brass; Jubal, the father of all such as handle the harp and pipe.*'[1] Next, people are gathered together in villages and towns. We read of 'fenced cities,' and from life in towns, we get commerce and merchandise: we read of '*Zebulun dwelling at the haven of the sea*,'[2] which was a harbour for ships, and of '*the Midianitish merchantmen who passed by*.'[3] Society became more and more complex; man advanced, step by step, in the arts of life and in the refinements of civilization, according to a law of progress which is as clearly seen at work in the Bible as it is in all secular history. Nothing can be more in accordance with fact and experience than the development of man as depicted in the Bible; first the savage, then the hunter, then the shepherd, then the agriculturist, then the craftsman, then the congregating of people in towns, and out of all this the growth of commerce. You will also notice, side by side with this development, the growth of the family into the clan or tribe, and the growth of the tribe into the nation. I do not desire to lay too much stress upon this correspondence between the Biblical and scientific accounts of the growth of man

[1] *Genesis* iv. 21–22. [2] *Genesis* xlix. 13. [3] *Genesis* xxxvii. 28.

in civilization, for the Bible is not a primer of science ; but at the same time it is interesting and instructive to notice that the order of progress indicated by the one is the order indicated by the other. It makes the Bible of far greater value when we see that its story of man is not the story of a once perfect being, ruined by a trivial offence, but of a being whose course from the first moment of breath until now has been of slow but sure progress.

2. Notice that we have in the Bible the story of man's growth in Individuality.

The idea of individuality, the sacredness of the individual life, the inestimable preciousness of each human soul, the doctrine that every man has a right to be himself, and that every man is of value to God—this idea scarcely exists in the early part of the Bible and has no prominence. The absence of such an idea accounts for human sacrifices ; it was because Isaac had no right in his own life and did not belong to himself, but to his father, that he and Abraham saw nothing unnatural in his proposed death.

The absence of such an idea accounts for the cheapness in which human life was held, for the wholesale slaughter of the Canaanites, women and children as well as men at arms, for the destruction of the families of the men who had been convicted of crime, as Korah, Dathan, and

Abiram; it accounts for slavery and polygamy.

In all the ancient world this remarkable want is apparent, a true idea of the individuality of man, an adequate conception of him as an independent person, a substantial being in himself, whose life was his own and who had natural rights of his own. Man always figures as an appendage to somebody else—the son to the father, the father to the chieftain, the wife to the husband, the slave to the master, the subject to the monarch. He is the function or circumstance of another. In the early civilizations of Greece and Rome, as well as Israel, the individual was nothing, the family was everything. Society was not a collection of individuals, but an aggregation of families. The unit of society was not, as it now is, the individual man, but the family. So if the head of a family was a criminal, his wife, children, and slaves, who had no rights apart from him, were all supposed to be involved in his guilt, and were punished with his punishment. In a public execution the criminal's family was put to death.

There was, in fact, all over the world a totally different conception of human rights from that which now prevails. Thus the law of Lycurgus, for the destruction of weakly infants in Sparta at their birth, would have been impossible had there not been a very different conception of the

rights of the human being in his own life from that which now exists. With us, the rights of man commence at his birth, and an infant an hour old is recognized as having a moral and legal right of property in his own life which the whole world cannot take away from him. Had that been the received idea in the age of Moses, the wives and children of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram could not have been sacrificed as they were. It was an idea too great even for Moses. It is an idea so self-evident to us that we can hardly conceive of society without it, and we are apt to suppose that it must have been equally self-evident to any human being, in any age, who had the simple exercise of his reason. But all history shows, as well as the Bible, that so far from this idea having been always obvious to the human understanding, it is a plant of slow and gradual growth. It is a defective idea of individuality we see set forth among the Jews. But we also see its purification and development. It was the glory of the Prophets that they brought a better thought of man to light.

Never yet in the world's history, before the days of Isaiah, had a man been *more precious than gold !*[1] Nothing had been so cheap as human life. But far away in the distance the prophets saw a day, when a man would be a treasure above

[1] *Isaiah* xiii. 12.

price; it was their glory that they looked forward to a time when the question should be asked, '*What shall a man profit if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?*'[1]

As the story advances from Moses to the later prophets we see the idea of individuality growing. Each man is responsible for his own deeds only. In the days of Ezekiel it would have been impossible to put a man's wife and children with him to death for crimes that he alone had committed, since that prophet taught '*The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.*'[2] What a long way we have travelled from the reckless treatment of human beings in the days of Moses, to the teaching of Christ about the value of *one* sheep and *one* lost piece of silver! Christ saw that each human soul was in distinct personal relation to God. He saw that God had a thought of beauty about each vile sinner; a care and a purpose for him which forbade his being treated with contempt, or as of no account. He was a child of God, made in God's image, and therefore unspeakably precious.

It is this idea which is the true basis of our modern democracy; it is the vitality of all the political movement of the future. No doubt the

[1] *Matt.* xvi. 26. [2] *Ezekiel* xviii. 20.

idea of individuality may, and has, run into extremes, but it is an idea destined to bear much precious fruit. Now this idea came not from the Old Testament, where at most it is only a prophetic hope, but from the New Testament, where it is a living, burning message. Heathenism had no such notion of man as man. Judaism had it not. The ancient Republics were strangers to it, for they were nothing but oligarchies built upon slavery. It came with power into the world for the first time when it was revealed that it was not for the high, not for the philosophical, not for the wealthy, not for kings, or nobles, or patricians, but that it was for man as man, for each soul of man, that Jesus poured out his soul unto death. Man, God's child; God, man's heavenly Father; Christ living and dying to uplift the outcast and the beggar—this was the gospel of Individuality. It is a gospel which the Bible slowly unfolds, until we hear Christ saying, possessed as he was with a sense of the unspeakable value of man as man, though he be slave or criminal '*I am come to seek and to save that which was lost.*'[1]

The dignity and value of man as man is the ruling idea of our nineteenth century civilization. It is that which gives life to whatever of good there is in Secularism; it is the secret of what vitality there is in Comtism. When Secularism

[1] *Matt.* xviii. 11.

speaks of the rights of man, it is simply translating the language of the Bible into its own dialect; and when Comtism magnifies the idea of humanity, it but echoes the teaching of Jesus Christ. It has been the special cry of the modern Reformer that it is not as king, or as peer, or as a star of refined life, or even as a cultivated or educated person, that man is great, but that he is great in himself; that every man has in him the dignity and excellence of human nature, and is an independent being having inalienable rights.

Listen to Shelley :—

> Yon sun,
> Lights it up the great alone? Yon silver beams,
> Sleep they less sweetly on the cottage thatch
> Than on the dome of kings? Is mother-earth
> A step-dame to her numerous sons, who earn
> Her unshared gifts with unremitting toil?
> Yet every heart contains perfection's germ:
> The wisest of the sages of the earth,
> That ever from the store of reason drew
> Science and truth, and virtue's deathless tone,
> Were but a weak and inexperienced boy,
> Proudly sensual, unimpassioned, unimbued
> With pure desire and universal love,
> Compared to that high being of cloudless brain,
> Untainted passion, elevated will
> Which death might alone subdue.
> Him, every slave now dragging through the filth
> Of some corrupted city his sad life,
> Pining with famine, swoln with luxury,
> Blunting the keenness of his spiritual sense

> With narrow schemings and unworthy cares,
> Or madly rushing through all violent crime,
> To move the dead stagnation of his soul,—
> Might imitate and equal.

Where did the poet get this idea? Out of the Bible, however reluctant he might be to own it. It does not exist elsewhere. We know the history of this idea, as we know the history of a scientific idea, a discovery, or an invention. The very men who reject the Bible are indebted to the Bible for the most valuable thing they have to teach. It is instructive to see how full the world has become of this idea of humanity when once disclosed; how it exults in it when once it is understood. Often it is distorted and often exaggerated; but, however coloured and discoloured by human thought, it is a saving idea which has taken possession of the world, and divides ancient from modern society by an immeasurable gulf.

But while Christ's doctrine of man has revolutionized society, it has done so by the gradual influence of an unseen spirit, not by rules and regulations. There is, for instance, no express prohibition of slavery, either from the lips of Jesus or his Apostles. John Wesley said that 'slavery is the sum of all villainies'; but it is doubtful whether Paul thought slavery to be a particularly dark evil. The Apostles did not see

how far the principles they were teaching led them. But the New Testament gave to the world an idea of man side by side with which slavery could not exist.

Still more striking is the victory of this idea over the ancient sentiment in regard to marriage and the relation between the sexes, involving, as it did, the degradation of woman.

Polygamy disappears. Woman is made the spiritual equal of man. No prohibition is issued : no rule is laid down. But the idea of individuality, in the course of time, won its way—the idea that every woman, as well as every man, has sacred rights—an independent existence, an individuality of her own, a nature more precious than gold.

Nor has the development of this idea come to a close. Still we do not value men as we should. Still we think with contempt of the peasant, the slave, the criminal, the negro. Still selfishness and pride cheat us into the belief that, in one way or other, we are superior clay to the ignorant, the dull, and the superstitious. Still we find it hard to believe that man is made in God's image ; but when we do once believe it, when the world realizes its full meaning, then will come the long looked for golden age, and then ' up springs Paradise around.'

X

EVOLUTION IN THE BIBLE—MORALITY

When the idea of evolution first seized upon the world it was thought to ignore, if not to deny, the agency of God in creation. If the perfect and complete horse did not spring into existence in a moment, at the fiat of an Almighty will, it was said that the Almighty did not make the horse at all. If man came up from lower stages of animal existence by successive generations of growth, then it could not be true that God made man in his own image. Orthodox divines could not conceive that God made the horse at all, unless he did it in a particular way ; nor that he was the Creator of man, unless man was called forth instantaneously. They said that such a theory of the *process* of creation did away with the Creator. But is it less wonderful and less worthy of the wisdom of God that he should create slowly and gradually instead of suddenly and all at once ? The means, the *how* of creation

implies no opinion one way or the other as to the source of creation. Ought God to seem to us less or more real and august, because he works by the method of evolution, which is in harmony with all our works, rather than by another method of which we have no analogy in human experience ?

So people have found it hard to believe that God has been the teacher of man, unless he gave man the perfect religion and the perfect morality at the beginning. They are shocked when they hear that it is a very imperfect conception of God we have in the Pentateuch and a very imperfect moral ideal. When Mr. Matthew Arnold tells us that we have in the Old Testament a spiritual God, and a spiritual religion, and a lofty morality gradually and on an immense scale *discovering themselves and slowly becoming*, and not as in the popular view, ready made of precise dimensions, many cry out 'Atheist!' But where is the atheism ? Is God less real and wonderful because he teaches men gradually and as they are able to bear it, rather than flashing the full light of noonday upon them all at once ? Shall we say in our ignorance, unless God taught men by a particular method we will not believe he taught them at all ? Let us be at once more humble and more scientific. Let us study the facts before we frame our theories as to his methods.

Studying the Bible, then, as we study nature,

not to make it square with preconceived theories, but simply to find out the facts and then let the theories grow out of the facts, we learn that man's moral instruction is in line with God's methods of working in all other directions. The perfect form, the perfect morality is not at the beginning, but at the end. There is not one only moral standard in the Bible, but many standards. The morality of Jacob is on a lower level than the morality of Moses, and the morality of Moses is far behind that of Isaiah. David has not that lofty ideal of conduct we see in Hezekiah, and Hezekiah is not to be compared with St. Paul. There is growth throughout, and the distance from the Ten Commandments to the Beatitudes of Jesus is immeasurable. The glory of the Bible record is this—not that Genesis is as useful a moral guide as the four Gospels, but that there is constant progress. The precepts at the beginning are faulty, the morality is defective, but there is a perception in the minds of the successive heroes of Jewish history that something better may be attained. All its noble spirits are marked by this—that they look forward, that they are dissatisfied with things as they are, that they see, as in a dream, a fairer social state and a nobler morality drawing them on.

I take it that this is always the work of inspiration; not that the inspired man is infallible,

or sees the complete and perfect moral truth, but that he rises in moral stature a little above the level of his times, and discerns, earlier than his fellows, the next stage in moral progress. In the Jewish religion and morality there was something over and above the actual letter of the law; there was also a principle of progress in the system; an inner spirit and movement; an impulse which tended strictly in one direction. The dispensation looked out of itself: it looked forward; and the prophets were always painting glowing pictures of a better and brighter day which should appear. The belief in a better rule of life on earth was the standing prophecy of the Jewish religion; it did not belong as an individual gift to particular persons, but dwelt like a guiding spirit in the nation, inspiring it with an ideal which dwarfed the present state—a good in the distance, towards which it was advancing. When the Jew sinned he knew he had sinned, and when he obeyed the law he knew that he was not yet perfect. His vision overlooked the immediate present to fix upon a remote horizon which was illumined with a mysterious glory, and gleamed with a moral beauty and perfection, when violence should no more be heard in the land, and greed and passion should be so subdued that the lion should lie down with the lamb.

Thus while the Divine, unseen spirit of religion

made use of an imperfect moral standard—the only one for which civilization was then ready—it was slowly educating men up to a higher standard ; and while God, as it were, accommodated himself to the childhood of man and to a defective idea of right and wrong, he was at the same time eradicating it and preparing the way for something better.

Now in judging the various moralities of the Bible, we must remember that all prescribed duties, tables of commandments, and rules of conduct are relative. They are none of them the absolute and perfect morality ; the things commanded or forbidden are right or wrong under the circumstances ; they may under one set of circumstances be right and under another wrong. It is true there are eternal principles of morality, which are the same for all ages ; but their interpretation varies, and the rules by which they are carried out are modified from time to time according to the changed conditions of social life. Duty is relative to knowledge and ability. Those savage races in Central Africa, through which Mr. Stanley has been making such a perilous journey, are not to blame because they do not love their enemies, but hate them unto death. They know no better. They are to be pitied but not blamed. They are in the same condition as the Jews when Moses said to them, '*Thou*

shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy.'[1] The Jews had no knowledge and no faintest conception that it was their duty to love all men; and they are not to be blamed for hating their enemies, because in their then state of transition they knew and could think no other. Forgiveness of enemies was a thought impossible in those days and therefore not a duty. The thought slowly grew. Even so great and noble a teacher as Plato knew it not, and commended the Athenians, above all the people in Greece, because they had manifested to their enemies the Persians 'a pure and heartfelt hatred.' *That* was an Athenian's duty in the time of Plato, as it was a Jew's duty in the time of Moses.

Duty then is relative to knowledge: it is also relative to ability. What a man cannot do, is no sin for him to omit. The command is '*Bear ye one another's burdens*';[2] but suppose a man is a helpless cripple, and suffers daily from distressing sickness, how can he fulfil the duty of burden-bearing? Duty is also relative to circumstance and opportunity. '*He that provideth not for his own family*,' says an Apostle, '*is worse than infidel*,'[3] and no duty is more generally binding than this. But when John Rogers went to the stake for conscience' sake, he left his family unprovided for. Was it his duty to provide so

[1] *Matt.* v. 43. [2] *Gal.* vi. 2. [3] 1 *Tim.* v. 8.

absolutely for his family, that he must deny his conscience in order that he might live to be their support? The relativity of Duty must be borne in mind when we judge the morality of the Old Testament.

We need neither be shocked nor surprised when we find duties commanded to fulfil which would be criminal now. '*Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.*'[1] The command to stone to death unruly and disobedient children, on the simple accusation of their parents—such things in these days would be cruel, horrible, and impossible. In Deuteronomy xiv. 21, we read—'*Ye shall not eat of anything that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates that he may eat it: or thou mayest sell it unto an alien.*' How does such a way of getting rid of bad meat recommend itself to your conscience? Precepts like these betray a very defective morality.

Let us take the case of slavery. Slavery is inculcated and legislated for in the Pentateuch and recognized as moral, and in those days it was moral. It was a distinct advance in humanity on the old practice; it was relatively better than that which preceded it. Slavery grew out of the question—what are we to do with prisoners taken captive in war? At first it was the custom to massacre them indiscriminately: every war

[1] *Exodus* xxii. 18.

was a war of extermination. But by and by a more humane thought took hold of men; this indiscriminate slaughter of helpless prisoners came to be regarded as too shocking, and they were made slaves instead. It was a step forward in morality and a gain to civilization.

The same is true of Polygamy, intolerable as the idea is to us. It was at the time a gain to civilization and an advance in morality. If you carefully trace the growth of social life, you will find that there are lower stages than Polygamy. There was a time when human beings herded together promiscuously, and there were no ties binding any particular woman to any particular man; there were no permanent families; there was not the shadow of wifehood. But Polygamy represents a higher stage of morality: it is a recognition of some sort of binding tie between men and women, and a new sort of family relation. It is man's first step out of barbarism, and, relative to his knowledge and circumstances, marked a stage of moral progress. We have outgrown it, but we can look back upon it as having had its place in the evolution of morality.

Is Jacob then to be blamed because he was a Polygamist? Not at all. Such a conception of the family and of the relations of the sexes was not wrong for him, and we are foolish to expect that on such a question he should be before his

time. But that which was not wrong in the Patriarchs would be unspeakably wrong in us. The morality which is good for the negro in Central Africa is not good for the civilized man.

Let us turn to the Sermon on the Mount and hear Jesus saying: '*Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time . . . . but I say unto you*,' etc.[1] This is how the Great Teacher prefaces his instruction on five points of morals and conduct. Taking up the questions of murder, adultery, oaths, retaliation, and the scope of human love, he shows that the ancient rule is not large enough for the children of the newest time. Thought, feeling, and civilization have advanced, and demand a more spiritual morality. The old rule was sufficient for the age in which it was uttered, and remained sufficient for many a succeeding age; it was as much as men could then take in: but man has since made progress, and now Jesus proceeds to expound a higher law. In another place he says, '*Moses for the hardness of your hearts gave you commandments which were not good*'[2]—that is, which were not absolutely good. They were good for the age and time and circumstances; but they passed away when men reached a higher stage of civilization. The Jews under Moses could not have understood the lofty spiritual teaching of Jesus; they needed something

[1] *Matt.* v. 21. [2] *Mark* x. 5.

rougher, and on a lower level of thought and feeling. But you cannot have the higher stage of growth without the lower. Is the Bible, then, of less moral value to us because we see in it a growing morality? Not so, but it is no longer of equal value in all its parts. If we assert that the morality of the Pentateuch belongs to a more elementary stage of human life than the morality of the Sermon on the Mount, we simply assert that the one is less profitable for our instruction than the other. And yet the examination of the lower stage in the Bible is of value because it gives us a profound conception of God as an Educator, training with Eternal Patience the races of men into ever higher knowledge.

Notice, as a specimen of his teaching on other questions, how Jesus deals with the ancient law of Retaliation—Lex Talionis. The Mosaic law ran—'*If a man cause a blemish to his neighbour, as he hath done, so shall it be done to him, breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth.*'[1] And again, with awful, horrible minuteness, '*Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.*'[2] Now this is a rude and early conception of justice, which we find in all primitive races. Man's first notion of justice is, like for like. To retaliate in the same manner is the only way to punish the criminal;

[1] *Lev.* xxiv. 20. [2] *Exodus* xxi. 24–25.

and revenge, according to a recognized law, is an advance upon a state of society in which criminals go unpunished. In this way we see man's sense of justice struggling into shape. But it was very imperfect, and gave rise to many evils. You have heard of the vendetta which flourished so long in Eastern Empires and still is found in Corsica, the duty of the living relatives of a man who has been murdered, or even killed by accident, to revenge the death of the murdered one. Life for life cries the wild justice of revenge.

A little advance is made upon this in the Mosaic law, by the provision of Cities of Refuge for men who had killed by accident, or as we should say in case of justifiable homicide. If they reached the City of Refuge before they were caught they could not be put to death; yet if they were caught before they reached the city, the pursuers were justified in killing them. It was still very barbarous; but it was the effort to climb a little higher than the first naked, unconditional precept of 'eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'

When we have advanced to the book of Proverbs we have reached higher ground. '*If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee.*'[1]

[1] *Prov.* xxv. 21-2.

The writer here is a whole world ahead of Moses, and has a totally different conception of duty.

Next, listen to Jesus after he has quoted the Mosaic precept—'*But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.*'[1]

Humanity has at last come to its flower; the moral ideal is wonderfully exalted; love, mercy, and tenderness have taken the place of revenge. Popular critics of the morality of the Old Testament apply the coarsest possible argument to this subject. They think it enough to point to a rude penal law, such as the law of retaliation, to the wholesale slaughter of the Canaanites, to the cursing Psalms, to the treachery of Jacob, to the drunkenness of Noah, to the adultery of David, and it at once follows that this is the morality of the Bible. But this is to judge the sculptor from the broken fragments of stone.

It is not the morality of the Bible unless it is the morality to which the Bible leads up in the end. The morality is to be tested by what it became in Jesus, not by its previous stages of growth. The morality which permitted retaliation and polygamy was the morality of an inferior and subordinate stage of human existence, and this stage passed from use and sight as the higher

[1] *Matt.* v. 44.

emerged into view. The popular critic adheres to a class of commands which were stepping-stones to higher things; but the morality of the Bible is in what it became in its finest examples, and not in the preliminary stages. God in Old Testament history was working towards a spiritual religion and a spiritual morality. The Mosaic law was just as far as an unenlightened people could go; it was, indeed, a little in advance of the times; yet when you assert that it was imperfect you state a fact. But there were germs of something nobler within it, there was an inner design which you must also consider, a tendency, a principle of growth, by which the nation was brought up inch by inch, to higher levels of moral feeling and perception. There was the consciousness with the nobler spirits of Judaism that life must be urged on to conformity with a fairer vision. Look at David. Nothing that you can say of the murder of Uriah and the connexion with Bath-sheba can be too severe. You condemn his conduct with indignation, and you are right, but so does the Bible. When Nathan, the prophet, said, '*Thou art the man*,' all the avenging furies of David's conscience began to sting. But you will notice that this sort of crime on the part of an Eastern prince was quite common, and up to this time had been very leniently treated. Never before had a prophet dared to beard

such a prince, and say, '*Thou art the man.*' It is a landmark in the progress of morality. And David is different from other oriental kings in this, that he knows that he has done wrong. He had reached a higher conception of duty than others, and therefore he could not sin and be easy about it. It was not public opinion which tormented him, for public opinion in his age would have easily excused his offence; it was conscience rising above the age which tormented him, which compelled him to subterfuges and duplicities, and at length wrung from him the cry, '*Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God.*' Such a thing as this could scarcely have happened in any other country and court at that time, or in many a succeeding age.

It marks a great character, to take a higher tone than that of his time or nation; and although David fell, with him it *was* a fall, and not the ordinary level of his life, nor the path which he recognized as the right one. The same dark deeds might have been done by a Pharaoh or a Herod, and they would have been forgotten long ago: little noticed by the subjects, never reproved by a prophet, and causing not a moment's uneasiness to the monarch. But to see an Eastern autocrat miserable, tormented, punished, repenting, because of an act which any fellow-sovereign would have dismissed as a clever trick, this was

altogether strange, and showed a man rising in a moral sense to a higher level than the accepted level of his age; and so helping forward, as by a prophetic spirit, the moral standard of mankind.

In the Bible, then, we have a growing conception of morality. We see the idea in its rude beginnings, only half articulate, emerging with many a struggle, from the fleshly and the earthy; we see it in various stages of growth; we see it in its glorious and unique consummation in Jesus Christ. So it does not matter how many mistakes we find out in the Bible, nor does the imperfection of its heroes take away from its significance. For so long as the world wants to know what morality is, and how to get it, and how men rose out of an inferior morality and reached the high level of Paul and John, the Bible will hold its own. The idea is in other ancient books; but in the Bible it is plainer and easier to come at than anywhere else, and incomparably more impressive. The Bible has the genius for morality, for righteousness, for truth, justice, and love, and for making us feel what they are, and giving us an enthusiasm for them. It is true the ideal of morality we cherish now would have been impossible in the infancy of the human race. No one would have understood it. Had it been revealed it would have done more harm than good. But from the infancy of the race, we are shown the law of

progress at work; and along that line of moral development man steadily advances—sometimes, indeed, turning back, but always repenting with tears and shame and new resolution—slowly led on by God from one moral conquest and one moral ideal to another, until the great Son of Man appears with a conception so lofty, so beautiful, so spiritual, so perfect, that the world still fails of its achievement. But we have a prophetic hope in our hearts that we shall not always fail; and as once again the Christmas bells begin their joyful chime, we renew our effort and cry:

Ring out wild bells to the wild sky.

Ring out old shapes of foul desire;
  Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
  Ring out the thousand years of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
  The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
  Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

XI

THE RELIGION OF THE BIBLE

John Stuart Mill speaks with a touch of scorn of those who fancy the Bible is all one book. For, while it is a matter of convenience to have the writings of Isaiah, Solomon, Paul, and John bound up in the same covers, the arrangement is not without grave disadvantages. It has led people to forget that these books were written by very different authors at very different times, and representing very different periods of enlightenment, and different stages of morality and religion. It is only as we remember that the Bible is not one book of equal value in all its parts, but a library consisting of the remnants of two great literatures—the Jewish and the early Christian—that we have found the true key to its interpretation.

And yet, as the author of *Natural Religion* has pointed out, while it is a great mistake to think that the Bible is all one book, it is perhaps

a still greater mistake to think that it is *not* one book, or that it has no unity. From first to last, in poem and parable, in history and drama, in prophecy and in precept, it is concerned with the same things.

Its various books are linked together by the presence of a few leading ideas of immense importance to the welfare of mankind.

In some of the books these ideas are only in germ, or in an early stage of growth, while in others we see them in their full development. 'Certain large matters are always in question, and the action moves forward with a slow evolution, like the *dénouement* of a play, through a thousand years of history.' The later books are, in a very true sense, the fulfilment of the earlier, as the noonday is the fulfilment of the dawn, and the man is the fulfilment of the child. If we take up the Shakespearean fancy and say that the life of the individual passes through various stages, we may notice how widely different is the lover making a sonnet to his mistress' eyebrow, from the infant muling and puking in his nurse's arms; or the Justice of the Peace, full of wise saws and modern instances, from the whining schoolboy with his satchel and shining morning face. Yet the various stages, so widely different from each other, are bound together in a very real unity and make one life. So it is

that there is a unity in every national literature, notwithstanding the distance between its first early ballads and its latest and ripest authors. In like manner there is an unmistakable unity in the Bible which makes of its various parts a living whole.

From one point of view it is true that there is no such thing as the religion of the Bible, but that there are many religions in the Bible. Yet it is a mistake to think that there is not one religion in the Bible, although it is nowhere systematized or drawn out into the articles of a creed. We have in the Bible the record of man's continual search for God, that search taking on ever new and higher forms, and advancing along one definite line of growth and progress. Only when we speak of the religion of the Bible, we are bound to think of it, not in its crude and early stages, but what it was aiming at and became in its last and finest examples. The end and not the beginning is the test of Bible religion : what it is in the beautiful flower, and not what it is in the rough, hard, unattractive seed.

But the religion of the Bible, what it is the Bible is after, is very generally misconceived. Many people think that the religion of the Bible is the religion of heaven and hell, and that it is a book which teaches chiefly the littleness and worthlessness of this life and the greatness of the life to

come—only valuable because it shows us how we may, after we have done with life on earth, escape the pains of hell and secure the bliss of heaven. Nothing could be a more grotesque caricature. In the Old Testament scarcely anything is said about a future state at all. It does not appear that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had any conception of the immortality of the soul, or of life continued after death in another world. Moses is silent about it; Samuel never refers to it; and even in the prophets of later times there are no clear declarations of a future state. It was not until the return from captivity in Babylon, where the Jews had come in contact with the disciples of Zoroaster, that the thoughts of heaven and hell began to take hold upon their minds. Even then, such laboured pictures of the state of the dead, and the rewards and punishments meted out to them, as we find in Homer, Plato, Virgil, and Dante are entirely absent from Jewish literature. Not that the belief in rewards and punishments is wanting, but that men are rewarded and punished here and now. It is this present life with which patriarchs and prophets are concerned: how to live in peace and prosperity; how to get God's will done on earth. It is not until we reach the New Testament that the thought of a future life becomes part of the teaching of religion, although it never

assumes the prominence with Paul and John that it has done since with their successors. They do not dwell upon it as a motive of conduct; the basis of their preaching is not '*Flee from the wrath to come.*' We find no elaborate descriptions of the future state. A few simple affirmations about it suffice the Apostles. The Bible is not a book about the state of the dead, but about the conduct of the living.

Or, take the Christology of the Old Testament, which is supposed to run through its various parts and unite them to the New Testament, welding the whole into one book. If we find distinct prophecies of Christ in Genesis and in the succeeding books which are all fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ-idea constantly appearing through a thousand years of literary effort, then undoubtedly these books have the unity which comes from being linked together by a golden thread of Messianic prediction. That these books are linked together by common ideas I as firmly believe as I firmly disbelieve their Christology. Manifestly, it is more and more clearly seen that these predictions of Christ were never in the minds of the writers at all, but are *an afterthought*; and that men have found them in the Old Testament because they have first of all carried them there. Coming to these ancient writings with their minds filled with the thought

of Christ, they have seized upon passages which they could apply to their Master, and have concluded that this, of course, was their original application. 'The words of a genius, such as Shakespeare, have an ever-germinant significance, and constantly find new applications in modes of human life which Shakespeare could by no means have imagined.' Many ancient words which first had only a local bearing are now seen to have a secondary and world-wide bearing. But it was simply the local meaning which was present to the mind of the writer, and their wider prophetic meaning is given to them *after* the events of which it is supposed they speak. The words of Jacob on his death-bed, '*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah until Shiloh come, and to him shall the gathering of the people be*,'[1] are often quoted as a miraculous instance of prediction uttered 2000 years before the Christian era. But the Messianic idea had not yet risen among the Jews: it was an idea of much later birth than Jacob; and if, as I think probable, the Pentateuch was not given to the world in its present shape until 450 years B.C., how can we be sure that we have here the very words of Jacob, and not some gloss of the later editor to whom the Messianic idea was familiar? But, setting that consideration aside, let us ask, Have we here

[1] *Genesis* xlix. 10.

a translation on which we can rely? The fact is, this is one of those difficult and obscure passages of the Old Testament about which no two scholars seem agreed. The Revised Version gives three alternative readings in the margin, while other authorities still further enlarge the number. It would seem that the right rendering of the passage is as follows: '*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, so long as the people resort to Shiloh* (the national sanctuary before Jerusalem); *and the nations shall obey him.*' To fasten on these words a Christological meaning is the desperate resort of theologians, who *must* find in the Old Testament, willy nilly, texts to support their preconceived doctrines.

Or, take the application of the well-known chapter, Isaiah liii., to Christ. We can all see how marvellously it answers to the character, suffering, and work of the Son of Man; nor are we wrong in thus transferring it to our Master. But it is another question whether this was its original historical scope. The subject of this chapter is some martyred servant of God, recognizable by the Jewish exile in allusions here made to him, but who this man of sorrows was, whether Hezekiah, Josiah, the writer himself, or Israel as a whole, we cannot say. But we have no reason to think the application we make of these touching verses to Christ was at all intended by the prophet.

His words were larger than he knew. There is a well-known passage in Plato's *Republic*, descriptive of the career which would be necessary to prove a love of virtue for its own sake, and showing such a startling resemblance to the general outlines of the life and death of Christ that it is just as impossible for a Christian in reading it to keep such application out of view as it is in reading the chapter from Isaiah.[1] Both these voices from the past are in a very true sense prophecies of Christ; that is, they show an inspired idea of what perfect purity, love, and devotion must undergo in a world of sin. But if the one writer is to be credited with consciously predicting the historical Christ, there is no reason why we should deny this to the other.

The fact is the Christology of the Old Testament is altogether fanciful; and exists only in the minds of those who are committed to a certain theology. What can be more absurd than the application of that noble love-poem, the Song of Songs, to Christ and his Church! It is the travesty of interpretation. According to this method of treating the Bible men have caught at any isolated expressions which, by ignoring the context, could be forced into a Messianic allusion; and

[1] 'In such a situation the just man will be scourged, racked, fettered, will have his eyes burnt out, and at last, after suffering every kind of torture, will be crucified.'—Plato's *Republic*, II. 362.

by the same method, the Bible may be made to predict anything—the career of Napoleon the great, or the downfall of Napoleon the little. And indeed there are prophet-mongers who find all about the Napoleons in the Bible. Let us leave this unprofitable method of interpretation for something more sober and solid.

The leading ideas which give unity to the Bible, which appear more or less clearly in all the separate books and bind them into a great whole, and which, in the main and generally, may be called the Religion of the Bible, are as follows :—

1. The Consciousness of God.
2. The Providential government of the world.
3. Man's moral freedom and responsibility.
4. Communion with the Divine.
5. Righteousness the secret of happiness.
6. Sacrifice, passing through rite and symbol to spirit and life, the cross of Christ standing for its highest manifestation —the sacrifice of self to humanity, of ease to duty, of life to truth.
7. The world's progress towards an ever-brightening future.

These do not exhaust the list; but they are the ideas which stand out with prominence from first to last. In addition there are two great ideas peculiar to the New Testament which must not be overlooked.

1. Love the motive power of the perfect Christian life.
2. The future state and the Immortality of the soul.

There is no time to dwell upon each of these features of the Religion of the Bible. You will observe generally two things (*a*) That they are not dogmatic and theological ideas, but practical, moral, and spiritual; and (*b*) that they are not truths about which men and churches dispute, but about which all Christian people are agreed. Notice in particular two of these great leading ideas.

First, the Consciousness of God. From the 'Psalm of Creation' with which the Bible opens to the glorious dreams and visions of the Apocalypse, one thing is unmistakable—man's sense of relation to and dependence on God. We see the thought of God working itself clear from superstition, narrowness, and partiality, to such inspiring declarations as 'God is Love,' 'God is Light,' 'God is Spirit.' We see man for ever feeling after God if haply he may find him; we see and are made to feel and share the irrepressible craving of the soul after a perfection above us, towards which the struggling ages urge the world a little nearer. It was the glory of the Patriarchs that their hearts vibrated to the thought of God. With all their faults, weaknesses,

and immoralities, they had a conception of God higher than that of their age; they lived their lives in the presence of the Unseen; God was not to them, as to the people round about, an object of blind and pusillanimous terror. The God of Abraham is *a friend*, not needing to be appeased by human sacrifice—a dark and baneful usage Abraham is taught to abandon. How does psalm and prophecy throb with the idea of God! '*As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.*'[1] '*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*'[2] '*Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy for evermore.*'[3] '*Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near.*'[4] And so it goes on from page to page and from book to book, until we have that unique consciousness of God which we find in Jesus Christ—that union of man with God which he expresses in the words '*I and my Father are one*';[5] so that it was God thinking through his thought, and God loving through his love; that sense of oneness with God which made loneliness impossible even under the kiss of Judas and the curse of Peter. The whole Bible is vivid with the consciousness of God. The conception goes through many changes before the fullness of the truth about

[1] *Psalm* xlii. 1. [2] *Psalm* xxiii. 1. [3] *Psalm* xvi. 11.
[4] *Isaiah* lv. 6. [5] *John* x. 30.

God can be reached, but the sense is always there. Ten thousand variations are played on the one theme; but the theme is heard throughout, '*God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.*'[1]

It is this, first of all, makes the Bible of eternal value—it has the sense of God; it comes home everywhere to the seeking heart of man, moved as it too is by the sense of God. I know we are told that this is no longer true and that man has outgrown the sense, and the thought, and the need of God. But its mere assertion does not make it true. There are men among us in whom the sense of God is blunted and indistinct—and I know that some of these are disinterested and enthusiastic seekers after truth. But they represent only a passing phase of life, a back current that interferes not with the flow of the mighty stream. You tell me of the great names of agnostics and others who know nothing of God. Still, if names are to be weighed against names, where shall we find three of greater significance than Darwin, Carlyle, and Tennyson? If the nineteenth century has any intellectual giants at all, any prophets of truth and wisdom, these are among the first. 'No man,' said Darwin, 'can stand in the tropic forests without feeling that they are temples filled with the varied

[1] *Psalm* lxxiii. 26.

productions of the God of nature, and that there is more in man than the breath of his body.' Listen to Carlyle: 'This fair universe, even in the meanest province, is in very deed the star-domed city of God. Through every star, through every grass blade, the glory of a present God still beams.' And Tennyson, in yet more beautiful language, sings—

The sun, the moon, the stars, the sea, the hills, the plains,—
Are not these, O soul, the vision of him who reigns?
Speak to him thou, for he hears, and spirit with spirit can meet,
Closer is he than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.

Secondly, notice how the idea of righteousness runs through the Bible, joining all its parts together as by the links of a mighty chain. '*Do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God*,'[1] is its great practical instruction. '*The Lord loveth the thing that is right*.'[2] '*I will wash mine hands in innocency; so will I compass thine altar, O Lord*.'[3] The religion of Abraham is a religion, as King Abimelech says, of '*integrity of heart and innocency of hands*.'[4] Moses is not a theological teacher; he is a political leader and a moral reformer. The ten commandments formulated with authentic voice and for ever that moral order and right are paramount. The great souls of Greece and Rome were not wanting

[1] *Micah* vi. 8. [2] *Psalm* xxxvii. 28. [3] *Psalm* xxvi. 6.
[4] *Genesis* xx. 5.

in noble conceptions of duty; yet, as it has been finely said, 'No Roman legislator inscribed at the head of his statute the sublime demand, "*Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.*"'[1] Immoralities are denounced both in Athens and in Rome, but there is no one to write the fifty-first Psalm. Plato speaks as lofty words about righteousness as Isaiah, but they find no echo in the hearts of the people. It was the glory of Israel that the nation as a whole adopted the teaching of the prophets as its standard. This people, with a thousand backslidings, had yet the intuition and the genius for righteousness. '*It is joy to the just to do judgment,*'[2] was a saying, not for exalted philosophers, but for common life, heard every Sabbath day in every village synagogue. Whenever a prophet lifts up his voice, this is the burden of his cry, '*Cease to do evil; learn to do well*';[3] and although the Jews in the early stages of their religious development had learned many valuable things from those picture lessons, the rites and ceremonies which Moses had instituted, yet what streams of fiery contempt the prophets poured upon them when it came to be thought that they, rather than justice and mercy, were the true sacrifice of God? All history is looked at in the light of moral right and order. We are shown the great unrighteous

[1] *Leviticus* xix. 2. [2] *Proverbs* xxi. 15. [3] *Isaiah* i. 16.

kingdoms of the ancient world tottering to their fall because of their tyrannies, cruelties, and wickedness; we are shown how doomsday comes at last to every iniquity under the sun, how all things are moral, and how there is a trend and a steady bias in nature and in human history making for righteousness.

This imperishable feature of the Bible, now showing clear, and now for awhile clouded, unites its various authors and books in one glory and grandeur. The sense of righteousness, manifesting itself at first very imperfectly, grows with the nation's growth until it receives its consummation in Christ, who bears in his own person and teaching immortal testimony to the truth that well-doing is the beginning and the end of all religion, and the secret of joy and peace. '*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*'[1] All is moral. This is the gate of even the highest mysteries and the beatific vision itself, '*Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.*'[2] To hunger and thirst after righteousness is the only path of blessedness.

These ideas of God and Righteousness are the distinctive ideas of the religion of the Bible, as they are the unifying ideas of its separate parts.

[1] *Matthew* vii. 21. [2] *Matthew* v. 8.

The great value of the Bible is to animate and fortify faith in God and Righteousness, and to quicken within us the consciousness of their reality. For in the Bible they are vivid and intense, so that no one can miss them nor what they mean. We trace on its pages their growth ; and in our best moods we find ourselves responsive to them, because they were spoken, not only in the olden time by holy men, but are whispered in our own ears by the spirit of the living God.

XII

WHAT IS LEFT APART FROM MYTH AND MIRACLE?

In the first of these lectures I noticed that our own Bible has many features in common with the other great Bibles of the world. Our Bible does not stand alone in its moral precepts, and it has no monopoly of the great ideas of religion—God, conscience, duty, sacrifice, prayer, a future life. Neither are its miraculous stories peculiar to itself, nor its picturesque myths. The sacred books of Buddhists and Brahmins have their marvellous tales of the dead brought back to life, of sight restored to the blind, of incarnations and virgin mothers, of angelic appearances, visions and voices, magical fish with money in their mouths, talking serpents and asses, bread from heaven and water from rocks. Our widened knowledge of the races, religions, and literatures of the world shows us that such stories as these always arise in certain stages of civilization.

The mind of man, ignorant of science, not yet trained to reason rightly or to observe accurately, was on the look out for the marvellous, and gave to every startling or unusual event a supernatural explanation. Under certain circumstances, wherever men are found, there is, as Shakespeare says—

> No natural exhalation in the sky,
> No scope of nature, no distempered day,
> No common wind, no customed event,
> But they will pluck away his natural cause,
> And call them meteors, prodigies and signs,
> Abortions, presages, and tongues of heaven.

There is no imposture in all this. For want of better knowledge it did not seem unlikely that the thunder should be the angry voices of the gods, or that an eclipse should be caused by a great dragon trying to devour the sun, or that the ticking of an insect in the woodwork, heard only in the stillness of the night, should be the sign of quickly coming death. But as knowledge grows from more to more, it is seen that all these things are capable of natural explanation, and happen according to well-known laws ; the margin of the marvellous and miraculous is gradually reduced. So many strange things have been found at last to have perfectly simple and natural causes, that the conviction is forced upon us, all things that happen or have happened will be thus explained when once we apply the key of knowledge. We see now that miracles do not happen.

A thousand wonderful things, which years ago would have been accounted for by miraculous stories, are now accounted for by the regular operations of nature.

The first answer of many people to the question, How much will be left of the Bible when myth and miracle are taken out ? would be, Very little. Myth and miracle have seemed to them so very important and to involve such large doctrinal conclusions, that a Bible from which they were left out must, they think, be very shrivelled in size and shorn of half its teaching. On the contrary, were the miraculous entirely blotted out of the Bible, you would not have reduced its volume by one-tenth, nor its moral and spiritual teaching in the smallest degree whatever. The force of the ten commandments remains, whether you believe or disbelieve that they were written by the actual finger of God on two tables of stone. It is still wrong to steal and murder, although the thunders of Sinai be resolved into a myth ; we know that God still says, '*Thou shalt not commit adultery*,' although the granite crags of the desert never burned with fire. God is still the righteous ruler of men, although Elijah never called down flames from heaven to consume his sacrifice ; and the Beatitudes are robbed of nothing of their beauty because Jesus never drove a herd of swine into the sea. We can no longer believe that

diseases were cured by handkerchiefs which had touched the body of Paul, but this does not affect in the least our estimate of Paul's greatness, nor take away one jot or tittle from the value and inspiration of that remarkable series of letters, written by his own hand, which have been preserved to us in the New Testament.

The question of miracles does not seem to me so important as those who believe in them, and many who disbelieve in them, would have us think. It is said that the Christian faith is grounded on and attested by miracles. But if Christianity can only be believed because it is accompanied by miracles, it rests on a rotten foundation. No miracle, no manifestation of power, can prove moral and spiritual truth. This is not the popular opinion, but a simple illustration will make it clear. Suppose I could change by a wave of the hand, this Bible on my desk into a plum-pudding, I should not make what I am saying truer or more reasonable. Such a miracle would not prove that I was a teacher sent from God or that my doctrines were the truth of heaven. It would prove that I knew a good deal about the transmutation of one substance into another substance, but it would by no means prove that I was an authority on questions of faith and conduct. Yet I know that many ignorant people would feel differently. In their judgment,

could I visibly and undeniably, without any trickery learned of Maskelyne and Cooke, change this Bible into a plum-pudding, or this hymn-book into a loaf of bread, I should be regarded as an infallible teacher of morals and religion. But educated common sense knows that such a tremendous inference is quite irrational. Unless the reason is convinced, and the heart captivated, and the conscience quickened by the truth itself, no miracle and no wonder can commend it to us as the Bread of Life.

Theologians say of Christianity, All is gone if miracles are given up; Atheists say, Miracles are no longer credible, therefore Christianity is false. I deny the one as I deny the other. I say that the Theologian attaches too much value to the preservation of miracles, and the Atheist too much value to their destruction. All that is purest, brightest, and best in Christianity, all that appeals to conscience, which has a purifying influence on the heart, which makes known to men a Father's grace and truth, which touches the mystic susceptibilities of the spirit, is altogether independent of this miracle or that. What makes a man a Christian, is not belief in the accuracy of the writer who tells us that Christ restored the ear of the servant cut off by Peter in a moment of blind frenzy, but to be pure in heart, to hunger and thirst after righteousness, to be meek and

merciful, and to love as Christ loved, to trust and obey a Father in heaven in Christ's spirit, to cherish the mind that was in Jesus. Nothing of value in Christ's teaching, nothing of wisdom in his words, nothing of beauty in his character, nothing of inspiration in his example, nothing of persuasion in his cross escapes us when we give up miracles. It is not true, as is commonly asserted, that miracles are inseparable from the life of Christ or from the religion of the Bible. At this time of day it is monstrous to assert that if I am compelled to disbelieve in the story of the blasted fig-tree, I have no longer any right to call Christ my master, and that I can have no confidence in what he was and taught. It is both stupidity and folly to say that discipleship to Christ is impossible unless I believe that Peter drew a fish to the shore with a penny in its mouth. Jesus Christ rises in my estimation as I see his wonderful influence over men was gained, not by exhibitions of magical power, but by the force of his unique character, his limitless self-sacrifice, his grasp of the burden of sin, his fellowship with God, his unbounded, never-failing sympathy.

I do not take up the position that miracles are impossible. I do not know what is possible or impossible in God's world. Whether miracles have ever happened is entirely a question of evidence. Is the evidence trustworthy? Does

it come from people whose habits of observation prevent them falling into mistake? Or, does it come to us from an age accustomed to believe in the marvellous, when faith in miracles was in the air, when wonders were looked for, and myths and legends sprang up as in their natural soil? What is the worth and amount of the evidence? For evidence, it must be remembered, may be perfectly honest and yet mistaken. I have no patience and no respect for those who say that the Biblical writers were impostors because they recorded as miraculous things that were not miracles. There is no reflection on the moral character of these men. I could as soon believe in that most improbable of all the miracles, in the standing still of the sun in heaven, as believe that a man like John would tell lies even to magnify the fame of his master. Witnesses are often true and upright, and yet their evidence is not trustworthy. The men and women who gave evidence as to the baleful influence and the dark deeds of witches were quite honest and believed every word they said; but we now know that they were mistaken. The simple-minded peasants of Galilee, seeing how the paralysed and the demoniac were cured, cried a miracle! a miracle! whereas growing experience and observation show that here was an instance of a not uncommon force often exercised by the

healthy over the unhealthy, the perfectly sane, morally and intellectually, over the insane—the force of will, of emotion, of imagination and faith. For many of the so-called miracles of healing were not miracles at all, but are to be accounted for by a well-known although little investigated and little understood law of mental and moral influence.[1] We know what was not known years ago, how greatly the mind influences the body: how by acting on the imagination and emotions, and by the power of living faith, wonderful and instantaneous cures have been wrought in accordance with natural laws. Quackery and deception have often been mixed up with cases of this kind; but no physician and no man of any general intelligence would doubt that such cures have been and still are, occasionally, performed. We may find instances quoted by such great authorities as Dr. Maudsley and Dr. Carpenter. The cure of a man sick of the palsy—that is paralysis—in this way would be a miracle for the spectators of the first century, while it would be no miracle now. Of course such a power of healing is confined to diseases which arise out of a more or less deranged nervous system: it might cure or alleviate neuralgia, as we know mesmerism does, but it could not restore a lost limb.

Now it should be noticed that the majority of

[1] Matthew Arnold's *Literature and Dogma.*

Christ's 'mighty works' were acts of healing of this sort, and these acts of healing by a faith wrought upon through imagination and emotion must be separated from those alleged marvels, such as the restoration of the lost ear cut off by Peter, or the blasting of the fig-tree, or the drowning of the swine, in which faith could not be a factor. We can no longer believe in marvels demanding a suspension of the laws of nature; but we can very easily believe in the acts of healing brought about by the action of one mind on another, and by the response of faith, because we have seen such instances in our own day, and know that all this is in accordance with nature.

Many people in these days have given up all miracles except those recorded in the Bible. They think that the miracles of the Buddhists and Brahmins and Mohammedans are altogether false; that the miracles of the Greek and Roman Churches are impostures; but that the miracles of the Bible form a class by themselves. Yet, if the question is to be settled by evidence, there is just as good testimony for many other miracles as well as those of the Bible. We read in the New Testament of the blind restored to sight, and we believe. But St. Augustine tells us that when he was a young man living in the city of Milan, a revelation was made to the great bishop

Ambrose of the place where two martyrs, Gervasius and Protasius, were buried. Many crowded to behold these venerable relics, and among them a man who was entirely blind. After much persuasion and pushing, the blind man made his way up the church to the shrine where the bodies lay, had his hand laid on the face-cloth of one of the sacred corpses and applied it to his eyes. Whereupon he received his sight. This, we are told by the stickler for Bible miracles only, was an imposture or an illusion. Why? The evidence supposed to prove the one is not a bit better than the evidence supposed to prove the other. Augustine was a man of the keenest intellect, and every whit as trustworthy as the writers of the four Gospels. He tells us that the cure of the blind man was known to himself and to the whole city, and excited a passion of joy and gratitude. Yet we are sure Augustine was mistaken. But if we cannot trust Augustine, how can we trust St. Luke?

Or, take the most striking of all the miracles recorded in the New Testament—a miracle exceeding in wonder even the raising of Lazarus. It describes an incident following immediately on the death of Jesus:—

'*And the earth did quake; and the tomb were opened: and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised; and coming forth out of*

the tombs after his resurrection they entered into the holy city and appeared unto many.'[1]

Did you ever consider what a marvel is here recorded? The raising of Lazarus from the dead was the raising of *one*; but here *many* were raised, and not simply after four days, but after age of entombment, and they appeared in the streets of Jerusalem. They were not ghosts; their bodies were raised, and they were seen by many. There is a circumstantiality about the narrative which shows the writer really believed it. But then, look at the difficulties of the narrative to us. What became of their bodies? Did these saints live their lives over again on earth? or did they go back to their tombs after a few hours or days? These are questions on which the narrative throws no light. A still more important question arises: how is it that this staggering, stupendous miracle is recorded in only *one* of the four Gospels? The other evangelists must have known it as well as Matthew: it was not a thing done in a corner, nor a thing that could be kept secret. Yet there is not a word of it in any other part of the New Testament, although it is impossible to imagine that Mark, Luke, and John would have been silent about an event so full of significance if it had really happened. We are driven to the conclusion that this is a mere myth, built up by the pious

[1] *Matthew* xxvii. 51–3.

imagination of some later disciple, and when it had been generally received as true, incorporated with the Gospel story.

For we have come to see how this sort of story, legend, or myth grows up. Herodotus relates that when the Persian invaders came to Delphi, two local heroes buried near the place arose, and were seen by many, fighting on behalf of the Greeks. Herodotus writes here of times when he himself was alive ; not of a fabulous antiquity. By his training he was a far more competent observer of facts than the evangelists, and his character stands as high as theirs.

Yet we say Herodotus was mistaken. No one now believes that this really happened. It makes a beautiful legend for poetry and art ; but if any one contends that Phylacus and Antonous actually arose out of their graves and took part in that battle between Greeks and Persians, we should regard him as demented. In an age when men are looking out for the marvellous, any unusual circumstance takes on a supernatural complexion, and a very few years suffices to produce a full-grown myth. The story of Herodotus and the story of St. Matthew, when placed side by side, are seen to be of the same sort, and to arise out of the same expectation of the wonderful. But we do not discredit Herodotus as an historian because in instances like this he was mistaken. We

discriminate. Neither do we discredit St. Matthew because he was sometimes mistaken. We discriminate.

For my own part, I should be sorry to use an expurgated Bible—a Bible from which all these stories of marvels and miracles had been cut out. They are 'linked to many a truth divine,' they have become to us full of symbolical meaning, parables and poetry suggestive of much that is valuable. Treat them as parables and poetry, and they help to nourish the religious life: treat them as history, and they become more and more an intellectual stumbling-block But suppose we expunge them entirely from the Bible, what then? What have we left? Almost everything of value. We have a noble and instructive history in which we are shown, on a large scale, man's moral and religious development. We have a history in which is revealed to our gaze, as in no other history, what is the secret of a nation's strength and happiness. Other nations are like bees working under ordinary hives of straw; this nation is like a community of bees working under a glass hive. We are permitted to see more clearly in their case than in others the providential hand of God, both in blessing and in punishment. We have 'the goodly fellowship of the prophets,' and their insight into the truth and the ways of God; we have the evolution of a spiritual from

a carnal Israel; we have lawgivers and seers, in advance of their times, bringing the world on from stage to stage of moral conception; we have poets expressing in words which are for all time the hopes, the sorrows, the burdens, the penitence, the aspirations, the triumphant faith of the human heart. And, to pass over much else, we have a character, unique in human history, which in its beauty, tenderness, matchless grace, love of truth, spiritual power, moral perfection, and universal sympathy, stands out as the '*first-born among many brethren*,' '*the chief among ten thousand*,' and this even though he never walked upon the stormy waters, and was the son of a human father!

We have been singing this evening Christmas carols which repeat in our ears, year by year, the beautiful myth with which the Gospel story opens. If you question me, I am compelled to say that I can no more believe a choir of angels carolled over the sheepfolds of Bethlehem, than I can believe that the world was made in six days. But far be it from me to say that the account of creation given in Genesis is of no value to me because I cannot accept it as science and history. On the contrary, it is to me full of instruction. It is a myth, but it grows out of a kernel of fact—that God and not chance made the world, that one Divine Being is the sole cause of the universe, that

all noble work is gradual, that man is made in God's image. As poetry I read it, and find it full of spiritual suggestion. If I may use it, not as history, but as the Psalm of creation, I will gladly do so.

Even as the opening words of the Old Testament are the Psalm of creation, so the opening words of the Gospel narrative may be called the Psalm of the *new* creation. Is Christmas an exploded legend because the stories of a miraculous incarnation and angelic appearances are only myths? Not at all. The myths have grown up around a kernel of fact. Jesus was born, whether an angel did or did not say, '*Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy.*' The solid fact of history marked by Christmas is the coming of Jesus, with its inexhaustible train of consequences, its unspeakable riches. It is tidings of great joy, and glory to God, and peace on earth, although the angelic song only arose out of the devout imaginations and fervours of early disciples. Beautiful and beneficent ideas are enshrined in the myth, and the heart of Christendom to-day gladly seizes the poetical expression which early faith gave to the advent of its Master. No more fitting vehicle for the hopes and joys awakened by the coming and the world-wide influence of Christ can be found than this exquisitely touching legend from the past—gleaming with the lights, faces, and music of a heavenly world.

XIII

THE RIGHT USE AND INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

PICKING up the other day a journal published by the Secularists, I read the following short and pithy announcement :—'The day of the Bible is over,' which to my mind was very much the same as if a man who had managed to exist on nuts, blackberries, and mushrooms, had solemnly announced to the world, the day of bread is over. On the contrary, we may confidently say, while here and there a man may be found who has learned to do without bread, for the vast majority of the human race, so long as they experience the daily return of hunger, so long will they turn to bread as their natural and enjoyable food. *The day of the Bible is over?* Precisely the contrary, I venture to say, is the case. The day of the Bible is yet to come. Hitherto the Bible has been largely misconceived ; the letter has been exalted above the spirit ; it

has been alternately quoted and derided as a scientific authority; men have gone to it as to a book of magic to save themselves from the trouble and responsibility of choosing and deciding; they have interpreted its sayings and events by methods which make it mean anything under the sun. Not long ago we were all laughing over *The Great Cryptogram*, a foolish book by a foolish American, intended to prove that Lord Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays. The author professed to have discovered in the plays themselves the key to a great puzzle. By piecing together certain lines occurring on certain pages, and at more or less regular intervals from each other; and by dividing words into halves, and then joining the half of one word to the half of another word, and so on, he made the plays tell us that Bacon was their author. But by the same method another ingenious puzzle maker could prove as easily that Abraham Lincoln wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, and the Duke of Wellington *As you like it*. It is not too much to say that the Bible has been too often treated as a great cryptogram. That truly devout soul and Christian poet, John Keble, adopted and defended an astonishing instance of this kind of cryptogrammic interpretation from one of the ancient Fathers. 'See,' he says, 'how Abraham, who first gave circumcision, looked forward to Jesus. He circumcised the

men of his household, in number 318. And this is a type of Christ on the cross, because 318 may be represented in Greek by the letters τ ι η, of which τ is in the shape of a cross, and ι η stand for the two first letters in the name of Jesus.' This, of course, is a puzzle and not a very clever one either, for the whole point turns on the passage after it has been translated into Greek, since the Hebrew letters have no such numerical signification. But the puzzle breaks down again when we remember that 318 was the number of Abraham's household not at the time of circumcision, but long before in the war with Chedorlaomer. This is explained by the theory that the mystery of the number was wonderfully revealed to Abraham and that his household was providentially kept at the same figure. Now the sad thing is, not that this was an interpretation discovered by an ignorant Father in the second century, but that it should be adopted and endorsed by a learned divine in the nineteenth century. It is one out of a thousand instances which might be given to show that the habit of interpreting the Bible as a puzzle still flourishes. I can only say if the Bible means all this plain men and women can never hope to understand it. Thank God, we are beginning to see that explanations like these do not interpret the Bible at all, but obscure it. That, in spite of such childish

methods of exposition, the Bible has worked so mightily in the past for uplifting, instruction, and comfort is a wonderful testimony to its vitality and influence, which no stupidity of commentators has been able to suppress. But we are only just shaking off these obscurities and shackles of interpretation, and the great days of Bible-influence are not in the past, but in the future. When once we learn to read the Bible simply and naturally, taking it for what it is, and not for what we think we should like it to be, it will get a hold upon the human heart such as it has never had before. Believing as I do that the Bible is one of the best gifts God ever gave to man, I believe that when it is valued for right reasons and not for wrong ones, and we have put its use and enjoyment on sure and safe grounds, it will exercise a sway over the growing life of man which will leave far behind all its past achievements.

'*The letter killeth; the spirit giveth life.*' This great saying I believe to be the key to the right use and interpretation of the Bible. We men of the nineteenth century, steeped in the habits, occupations, and thoughts of an entirely different civilization from that in which the Bible came to birth, are all abroad when reading it, unless we have learned to distinguish between the form and the essence, the transitory and the permanent, the accidental and the essential,

and to discriminate these two elements in religion and in a religious literature. It is blind adhesion to the letter which has so often led the Church into untenable positions. The real authority of the Bible has been gravely imperilled when men have invoked its letter to prove that it was impossible that human beings should live at the antipodes, that it was impious to believe that the earth went round the sun, that geology was a delusive science because it taught that creation was not the work of six days but of untold ages, that resistance to even the most arbitrary government is forbidden to Christian men, that God for his own greater glory has sent some men into the world foreordained to eternal damnation. All these mistakes arose from clinging to the form and forgetting the essence. '*It is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing.*' Literalism has been the curse of Biblical interpretation.

But I would have you remember that there is literalism and literalism. It was a great saying of Martin Luther's, 'The words of the Holy Ghost can have no more than one simplest sense which we call the scriptural or the literal meaning.' There is a sense in which literalism is among the first duties of the Biblical student. We are to go to Scripture, not to find what we think, but what the writers said. Our first duty is to ascer-

tain the exact meaning of the words they used, the meaning they must have had to those who first heard them. We must beware of reading into them our own dogmatic bias. In this sense, literalism, the rigid and determined exclusion of mere mystic fancies, the insistence on the grammatical, philological, historical, simple sense of the words, is of the utmost importance.

The wrong kind of literalism is that which sacrifices the sense to the mere sound; the kind of literalism which insists on abiding by the hard, naked letter in defiance of every rule which modifies the use of language. It is the temper of mind which reads poetry as if it were prose; which, for instance, if it found in the Bible the words 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players,' would insist that the Christian could only lawfully follow one calling, that of the actor. 'God,' as Luther so admirably said, 'does not reveal grammatical vocables, but he reveals essential things.' All human language, from its very nature is and must be very imperfect. The language of the Bible is full of gracious shadows. Thousands of texts of scripture, many of the utterances of Jesus, were never meant to be taken according to the letter; nay—if so taken, they would stand in antagonism to the essence of his teaching. Parables and metaphors, figures of speech, the

particular illustrations of great principles, must be taken into consideration at every step.

The strangest thing about the unintelligent literalism which dominates popular theology is that it is so perfectly arbitrary in its application. It will insist with tenacity upon the literal meaning of one text or set of texts which suits its purpose, while it calmly explains away as metaphorical another text or set of texts, which, if understood with equal literalism, would involve the modification or abandonment of some favourite dogma. They insist that when we read, '*everlasting punishment*,' everlasting must be interpreted according to the letter as meaning for ever, and ever, and ever; but when we read '*everlasting hills*,' they say everlasting is a figure of speech! '*All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*,'[1] means ALL; but, '*I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me*,'[2] means, not ALL, but *some*. There are thousands who denounce us as infidels when we call the story of the Fall of Man a myth or an allegory; and yet the same persons will, without the slightest warrant, apply the most extravagant allegory to verse after verse of the Song of Solomon. It was this arbitrariness which made the Roman Catholic controversialists say that Scripture was treated by Protestants as 'a nose of wax,' to be twisted this way or that:

[1] *Romans* iii. 23. [2] *John* xii. 32.

a sword which they could put into any scabbard.

What is wanted is intelligence, common sense, an appreciation of the limitations of language, and a conviction that the Bible is to be read in the same way that any other book is read, with discrimination—not turning poetry into prose, nor taking metaphor and illustration for command and dogma. John Bunyan used to be distracted with agony because he took quite literally the saying, '*If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove*';[1] and therefore felt driven to test his own faith by bidding the puddles on the Bedford road dry up at a word. But he would never have been troubled had he understood that Jesus was just using one of the common metaphors of the East, perfectly intelligible to his hearers. The notion that to 'remove mountains' was to be taken literally, was one which would only have caused a smile on the face of men who were accustomed to confer on any great teacher the complimentary title of 'A Remover of Mountains.' They would have understood in a moment that Jesus was expressing the divine truth that difficulties vanish before the power of faith.

'*The letter killeth: the spirit giveth life.*' This is to say, we must use the Bible, not as a book of

[1] *Matthew* xvii. 20.

rules, but as a book of principles. You all know the difference between a rule and a principle. It is the difference between a loaf of bread and a handful of corn. The loaf of bread is more immediately useful to a hungry man than a handful of corn. But when he has eaten it there is an end of it. It answers a temporary purpose, but to-morrow he wants another. A handful of corn, however, while it will not satisfy to-day's hunger, has in it the promise and potency of bread for generations. If sown it will bring forth a hundred-fold, and if sown again there will be a harvest sufficient for a nation's wants. A rule is for to-day; principles are for all time. A rule only fits a particular set of circumstances—change the circumstances, and the rule breaks down; but principles adapt themselves to all circumstances. The principle is, '*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*'; the rule was almsgiving. Now, however, the rule is no almsgiving, because it is no longer love to our neighbour to give to beggars in the street, but very great injury. Many of the illustrations of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are sore stumbling-blocks to people, because they think the illustrations are commands for all time. But the essential things are the principles—benevolence, the forgiveness of injuries, patience, sacrifice. How are we to apply these principles to

the circumstances of our own day is left to sanctified common sense.

'*The letter killeth : the spirit giveth life.*' This is to say, we go to the Bible, not for moral maxims, but for moral impulse ; not for a scheme of faith, but for spiritual inspiration. Moral maxims of equal beauty may be found in other books. Confucius and Seneca will supply us with a code of ethics much more systematic than anything we find in the Bible. What they do not supply us with is moral impulse. In the Bible the first thing that strikes us is, not the completeness of the ethical code, but the variety, interest, and charm of human biography with which it is filled. In its men and women we see good struggling with evil, a higher moral law ever calling them to fresh conquests, and embodying itself in their lives and endeavours. And there is something quickening in the story of moral effort in a human soul which is never found in a maxim. What we want in setting out on the journey of life is not a moral handbook with cut and dried rules for every difficulty, but the light and impulse of great examples. We want to know what others have done—the pioneers of godliness. We are artists who can never learn our profession from any manual of art, however complete ; but whose first necessity is to sit at the feet of the old masters and study their methods, achievements, and

aims. If we do this merely to make ourselves slavish imitators of the great artists of other days, then we shall utterly fail; but if we do it to enable us to profit by the efforts of the past in our own attempts to reach the ideal glimmering upon a far horizon, then it is invaluable. The Bible is full of most glorious examples, not to be copied in every particular, but to give us impulse to strive as they strove. Above all, it is dominated by one example which is unique. Here, indeed, in Jesus Christ, is a man. The world had never seen before what it was to be a man. It had heard plenty of moral maxims. Poets and prophets, lawgivers and psalmists, had set before it an ideal of the Perfect Life in words, but here was one in whom the words—

> . . . . had breath, and wrought
> With human hands, the creed of creeds,
> In loveliness of perfect deeds
> More strong than all poetic thought.

Christ was not so much a wonderful teacher as he was a wonderful fulfilment; he came not to give a new moral code, but to live a life, and in that life to realize all moral aspiration. In him moral beauty is no longer an abstraction: it is warm, living, and concrete; we can now believe in it, and we are moved by that glorious, pathetic life to believe that great moral achievement is no impossible thing for us. Following a leader

as we could never follow a maxim, we do and conquer a thousand things we should otherwise never attempt. What we receive from him is moral impulse—not a letter, but a spirit.

In the same way we go to the Bible, not to find a scheme of faith, but spiritual inspiration. If the Bible is to supply us with a ready-made creed, then it is wonderful that there should be such differences as to what this creed is. If it is intended as a formal treatise, supernaturally drawn up, to serve as a textbook of theology, then it must be pronounced a dismal failure. It is not a formal treatise at all, but a great literature, and it is not by quoting texts to prove our particular doctrines, but by saturating our minds with its spirit that we use it aright. How many books on theology, on the creeds, on various doctrines there are, which all proceed upon the method of proving this or that by an array of texts quoted from the Old and New Testaments, from poetical and prose writings, from history and legend, from Judges and Job as freely as from the synoptic Gospels, quoted indiscriminately and with no reference to the context. This is the abuse of the Bible. I once heard a good man prove the doctrine of the Atonement from the story of Cain and Abel. He told us that Abel's sacrifice was more acceptable than Cain's because it consisted of *blood*, whereas Cain's only

consisted of fruit. And this, forsooth, proved that sin could only be expiated by blood! Such a use of the Bible would be impious if it were not childish. No, the true use of the Bible is not to prove doctrine, but to move the heart to prayer, aspiration, loving effort, hopeful sympathy. When I read the words, '*The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms*'; when I catch the strains of David's harp, '*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise*'; when I listen to Isaiah's invitation, '*Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters*'; when I hear John saying, '*God is love*,' then I am lifted up above my ordinary self, I feel the attraction of the heavenly above the earthly, and there is excited in the soul a sense of life, love, and peace, which is worth more than all creeds. The glow of a living faith draws me near to God, and I am moved by that spirit of purity, truth, and self-sacrifice, which is the inspiration of the religious life everywhere, and the vital impulse of all true progress.

XIV

THE HIGHER CRITICISM

Those of you who are alive to the movements of religious thought in our day, or are in the habit of reading our religious journals, must be familiar with the phrase *The Higher Criticism*. You have seen it in the reports of speeches, sermons, and lectures, in leading articles, in magazines, and in the letters of angry or dismayed correspondents attacking it. To those of us who long ago gave up the popular theories of Biblical inspiration the anger and dismay seem both belated and absurd. It is as if at this time of day there could still be found adherents of the Ptolemaic astronomy, filled with anger against Copernicus and all his works. The controversies aroused by Colenso, Dean Stanley, Jowett, the pioneers of the higher criticism, seem so far away, and the position they took up, which once aroused the fiercest passions of men and churches are now so generally accepted even in orthodox circles,

that it is a little surprising to see good men still alarmed at what the higher criticism is doing. For one thing is certain—the higher criticism so far has not diminished any man's regard for the Bible, but by enabling it to be better understood, has enhanced its value even in the eyes of the most thoroughgoing of critics. That this will likewise be the result of new labours in the critical field not one scholar in a hundred ever doubts.

This much may be said in excuse for the alarmists, that the phrase, *The Higher Criticism*, is somewhat vague, and needs exposition before it can be properly understood. A 'critic' is one who is *able to distinguish*, and 'criticism' means the *power* or *art of distinguishing*. But there are of course wrong kinds of 'distinguishing' or criticism. Roughly speaking there are three kinds of criticism applied to the Bible.

1. There is '*Textual*' criticism—the examination of the words and their meaning when first used, and of the various 'readings' of any given passage in the best manuscripts; the proof that this passage or that has been interpolated and forms no part of the original text; or the proof that words and sentences have been wrongly translated. It was textual criticism to which the Bible was submitted by the Revisers, and the Revised Version is one of its noblest triumphs.

2. Secondly, there is '*Historical*' criticism—the weighing of the evidence for alleged events, the measure of proof that they did or did not happen, etc. Did the walls of Jericho actually fall down at the blowing of trumpets? Did the body of Jesus, reanimated, come out of the tomb? Was Jesus born at Nazareth or Bethlehem? These and many other disputed events are submitted to a criticism of judgment called 'historical,' they are weighed by evidence, by congruity, by probability, in fact by the same tests we apply to alleged events in Grecian or Roman history.

3. Lastly, we come to the '*Higher Criticism*,' which is partly historical, and more largely 'Literary,' and still more largely the application of human feeling, moral consciousness, and sanctified common sense to the problems of the Bible. The 'lower' criticism of the letter is 'textual'; the 'higher' criticism has in it a spiritual element. It does not ask, 'Is this saying to be found in all the best authorities?' but, 'Does it bear the marks of inspiration? is it congruous with other sayings of the same teacher? is it a genuine utterance of the speaker's or writer's when tried by what we know he was in life and character?' Again, 'while this passage or that belongs to the text *as we have it*, was it really written by the man whose name it

bears ? or have we in this book tradition gathered from various sources, the work of various hands, and embedded in the narrative—a skilful patchwork instead of a garment woven throughout on one loom ? Let us suppose a chapter of English history containing paragraphs from Bede, King Alfred, and William of Malmesbury, woven together into a narrative by some later hand and published under the name of Hume. The distinguishing of these paragraphs, showing their various authors would be one of the labours of higher criticism. Yet again, 'When the text of an ancient writing has been settled as accurately as possible by the canon of textual criticism, it becomes the province of the "higher" criticism to determine its origin, date, and (if it be composite) literary structure, by distinguishing between the *data* available for the purpose.'[1]

I cannot, however, agree with Professor Driver in limiting the higher criticism to questions of date, origin, and literary structure. Higher criticism is more than literary and historical; it tries any given utterance by moral and spiritual standards, and asks does it bear the notes of congruity and of a genuine inspiration. For instance, are these long discourses about the end of the world put into the mouth of Christ at the close of Matthew's gospel at all in keeping with

[1] Driver; *Preface to Lectures on the Higher Criticism.*

what we know of the character and temper and method of Christ, and with his teaching as a whole? Textual criticism has decided that they are a genuine part of the book. But although they are there, did Christ really utter them, or have we here genuine fragments of his teaching enlarged and misinterpreted by the legends and expectations which grew up about him in the early church? In Mark xiii. we are told that certain of the disciples went privately to the Master and asked him when these 'last things' should be. In reply he is reported to have said, of the sundry marvellous signs and wonders which had taken place, the Son of Man would be seen coming in clouds with great power and glory. '*And then shall he send forth the angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. . . . Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away until all these things be accomplished.*' Now is it credible that Christ told his hearers that in their own lifetime he would come back to earth and reign in great glory? We know that all these expectations of an immediate second advent cherished by the early church were disappointed. Was Christ the author of the disappointment? Did he really believe and teach that in less than thirty years time he would come back to earth in clouds, with great

power and glory? That cannot be answered by textual, historical, or literary criticism. It can only be answered by what I have called 'sanctified common sense,' that is by a sympathetic insight into the mind and character of Christ himself; and by asking, Is this like him? Is it congruous with the whole trend of his teaching? Is it likely that he himself was deceived? Is it in keeping with his simplicity and spirituality that he should talk in this mundane, scenic, not to say sensational way? I do not believe it. It seems to me it is impossible for anyone to believe it who realizes the spiritual character of Christ's teaching, and his wholly spiritual idea of the kingdom, and how he was always endeavouring to check the common notion of a material kingdom, with thrones and power and palaces, trying instead to make men realize that it was inward and spiritual. The prophecy in Mark xiii. is largely materialistic. It gives expression to a national dream which Christ was so far from countenancing that he strove unceasingly to turn men from it. To proclaim not the *advent* but the *eternal presence* of the universal kingdom was his self-imposed mission. About this the higher criticism says, We have here something quite foreign from the mind and character of Christ: being what he was and in view of his fundamental doctrine of inwardness it was impossible that he should

speak in this theatrical fashion. In parts of this chapter we breathe a quite different atmosphere from the Sermon on the Mount, the great parables, and the unquestioned ethical and spiritual teaching of the Master. Interpreted by these, much of this prophecy rings spurious, and must be laid aside as essentially false to the mind of him who said 'The Kingdom of God is within you.'[1]

I know it may be objected that this aspect of the higher criticism depends very much upon individual tact and perception, and requires a delicacy of touch and a sensitiveness of discernment which must always be uncertain in operation. But it is not claimed that this method is infallible. There is no method of interpreting the Bible which is free from mistake. The strictest adherent to the theory of Biblical infallibility has never claimed infallibility of interpretation. Further, Bible-study and interpretation is always governed by the assured knowledge and existing ideas of any given age. The idea of evolution has entirely changed the modern student's view of the Bible. In making that change the nineteenth century suffered a certain loss as well as rejoiced in a certain gain, and in some cases was led to erroneous conclusions. The higher criticism can claim no freedom from human error, neither can textual nor historical criticism. But the ability

[1] See Lecture VI.

required to distinguish between genuine and spurious sayings of Christ, the tact and delicacy of perception necessary, are not beyond the reach of any devout, sympathetic mind. All it needs is such a sense of the moral fitness between cause and effect as can detect in the gospels the fountain ideas from which the purest streams of moral and spiritual influence in the world's history have flowed. Those whose business it is in banks and behind counters to deal with gold and silver coins, get to know without applying chemical tests but by simple touch and sight, the difference between good and bad money. So those who make it their business day by day to emulate the spirit of Christ, may quickly learn the art of distinguishing the fine gold of his words, even though they have little scholarship.

The higher criticism thus has two aspects. In the first place it is that which brings the intellectual method of our time to bear upon Bible interpretation; and secondly, it is that which brings to the same work a certain elevated spiritual discernment.

In both divisions of the Bible these methods have been applied with the result of making the book as a whole more human, vivid, and instructive. The intellectual methods of the higher criticism, the methods of historical and especially of literary investigation have laid bare

the composite nature of the Hexateuch, showing us at least five different strands woven into the one web, and by editors who lived many hundred years after the death of Moses. It has placed the Book of Psalms under the microscope and discovered five separate collections of Jewish hymns, brought together in one book long after the return from exile, and teeming with ideas and conceptions which had no place in Jewish religious thought at the time of David. The most lenient judgment of scholars does not now allow David to have been the author of more than a dozen of these wonderful songs of penitence and praise. The higher criticism has clearly shown us two Isaiahs in the book of that name, and in the two divisions (ch. i.–xxxix. and ch. xl.–lxvi.) occasional fragments by other writers. But as I have indicated the higher criticism is not merely concerned with literary problems, questions of the date, authorship, origin, etc. It goes on to appraise the moral and spiritual value of the various portions of the Old Testament. It is the higher criticism which places the Song of Solomon, Esther, and Book of Judges on a lower level of religious excellence than Job and Isaiah. It is sanctified common sense, it is the spiritual aspect of the higher criticism, which repudiates the tone and morality of the cursing Psalms. It is the Higher Criticism which condemns the barbarities of the

Canaanitish wars, and refuses to allow them any moral sanction because they are prefaced by the convenient formula—'Thus saith the Lord.' It is the Higher Criticism which sets aside the thunder, lightning, and awful trumpet of Sinai as features that really accompanied the revelation of the Mosaic law. And if any are alarmed at this interpretation of the story, it is surely sufficient to remind them that the moral teaching of the Mosaic law remains untouched when all these picturesque elements have been stripped away. It is quite as wrong to steal and commit adultery although the rocks of the desert never echoed to a supernatural trumpet, and murder remains a crime although God never wrote the commandments on tables of stone. Higher Criticism is in fact the ability to distinguish between spiritual ideas and the drapery of legend, myth, and parable in which they are clothed, and which people destitute of imagination have too often mistaken for history.

But now a strange thing happens. While all scholars are agreed on the duty and advantage of applying the principles of the higher criticism to the Old Testament, there are some who when it is proposed to apply the same principles to the New Testament, cry 'hands off!' Even that candid critic, Dr. Driver, appears to think that the 'Higher Criticism' must be much more chary

when dealing with the Evangelists than when Deuteronomy is under review.[1] But it is impossible to fence round the New Testament from criticism when once the Old Testament has been subjected to its standards. A Bishop may see no incongruity between declaring his beliefs in the mythical nature of the story of the Fall and his condemnation of one of his clergy for speaking of the story of the Virgin Birth in the same manner. But men of simple common sense will say that the liberty of criticism which is claimed for the supernatural stories of the Old Testament cannot with justice be denied to men when dealing with those of the New. And if it be replied that a fundamental doctrine of Christianity is bound up with the story of the Virgin Birth, it is only necessary to point out that an equally fundamental doctrine is bound up with the story of the Fall. It appears to be thought that the New Testament can be saved from the Higher Criticism by throwing the Old to the wolves. But the higher critics are not wolves waiting to devour. They are the real friends of the Bible, withdrawing our eyes from details which we once fancied important, and fixing them upon the eternal truths and the grander elements which have been more or less obscured. Of both portions of the Bible alike it may be said in the words of Archdeacon

[1] See Preface to *The Higher Criticism.* Hodder & Stoughton

Wilberforce, 'intelligent criticism becomes the pathway to spiritual discovery.'

The Higher Criticism for instance cannot be excluded from the consideration of the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The conclusion, now everywhere accepted, that Paul could not have been its author has been arrived at not simply along the line of literary structure and historical evidence. There has also entered into the problem the question—'Does the teaching of *Hebrews* harmonize with the great Apostle's main ideas? or have we not here a different line of thought, and, in fact, a widely different theology from that which we find in *Romans* and *Galatians*?' But this discovery of a different line of thought which does not fit in with what we know of the mind of Paul, does not detract from the value of *Hebrews*, or imply that it ought not to have a place in the New Testament. On the contrary, it adds to the interest and instruction of the New Testament when we see how early in the history of Christian thought differences appeared, so that John moves in one direction, Paul in another, and the anonymous author of Hebrews in a third. This is a spiritual discovery of the most suggestive kind.

The Higher Criticism has been busy with the Fourth Gospel. Great scholars still differ as to its date and authorship. Literary and historical

criticism have not yet settled whether it was written by John or another. But in the midst of the dispute there is heard a knocking at the door, and a Higher Critic enters with the question —'Whoever was the author, have we here a faithful, literal record of the Master's words as he actually spoke, or a kind of *translation* of his ideas after they had passed through a mind coloured by a certain philosophy? Are these long, subtle speeches, tinctured by Alexandrian philosophy, which we find in the Fourth Gospel, congruous with the Jesus of the Synoptics who speaks in short, proverbial sayings? Is it a *record* of the life and work of Christ we are reading or an interpretation?'[1] Literary and historical criticism have their place in this discussion, but the matter cannot be settled, the question can hardly be understood, without the aid of that other feature of this Higher Criticism, the spiritual discernment which is born of familiarity with the mind and soul of Christ. A thorough acquaintance with the Jesus of the Synoptics compels us to say, quite apart from literary and historical investigations, 'what we have in the Fourth Gospel is a *reconstruction*, and a biography of Jesus from the point of view of a writer who has a doctrine of the personality of Christ to expound

[1] *The Bible in the Nineteenth Century.* By J. Estlin Carpenter, M.A. p. 412.

of which the earlier evangelists knew little or nothing.'

Let it then be understood that the Higher Criticism is not destructive but constructive, and lifts us up to where we see the moral and spiritual teaching of the Bible disencumbered of faulty history, of imperfect science, and of the swaddling bands of myth and legend. The Bible has a right to be understood. Our deep reverence for it compels us to interpret it along the line of its leading eternal and universal ideas, and not along the line of its local and temporary accompaniments. I know it sometimes seems that the devout and critical spirits are in conflict with each other, our own minds their battle-field, and that the former says to the latter, 'Thou art not a Christian; I can have no fellowship with thee.' But to say that is to play false to our own nature as well as false to the Bible. The need to know and to know truly is as deep within us and as God-given as need of prayer, or the power of faith. It is a divine compulsion to inquire and distinguish—that is, to criticize—which is laid upon the mind. Whatever may have been the case in other times, to-day frank and honest criticism is a necessity for the church's life. The work of the Higher Criticism is to save the moral and spiritual teaching of the Bible from being thrown overboard with so much of its history

and science. It distinguishes between the shell and the pearl, between the earthen vessel and the treasure it holds, between the letter and the spirit, between that which is of time and earth in the record, and that which is of heaven and eternity. Criticism, then, is a sacred obligation. It has in view a thoroughly positive end—to see truth as it is, freed from all accretions of time and place and partial knowledge. The Higher Criticism is a superior method of interpretation, a better road to the original teaching of Bible writers; it is the mental process whereby the true nature of Bible teaching is appreciated and manifested. It seeks to know the Bible from within and along the lines of its own meaning and purpose. Our duty to the Bible is different from that of our fathers, since each age is bound to interpret it in terms of its own experience, and in the light of its own intellectual as well as spiritual culture. We are called by criticism to a better understanding of the Bible than was possible in any earlier age. And the result is a Bible more vivid and richer in spiritual suggestion than the Bible our fathers knew—a book which is the autobiography of religion on earth, the record of the unfolding of man's spiritual nature, traversing all the distance from the lowest barbarism to the highest spiritual civilization under the inspiration of Jesus.

The changed view of the Bible brought about by criticism makes immensely for faith. The loss of the old view is, I know, to many most painful. It was a real comfort to their hearts to believe that they had a book which contained the infallible word of God. It was a comfort to believe that they could open this book and find a ready solution of all the problems that otherwise would be so troublesome. It was much to believe that they had here, from beginning to end, a transcript of the Divine mind. All that they have lost. But are there no gains? Is not the Bible coming back to us in another way as the grandest book in the world? It is coming back to us as a record of the aspirations, failings, sins, and strivings of a great race specially endowed with the genius for religion. It is returning to us as a human book, glowing with human fervour, thrilling with human hope, warm with human affection, inspired with the story of man's effort to get into right relationship with God. We are no longer responsible for its mistakes. We are not troubled to reconcile its contradictions. We have no longer to defend that in it which is indefensible. It is coming back to us as the greatest religious literature of mankind; a book profitable for doctrine, for correction, for instruction in the great deep things of righteousness, love, and peace; a

book we read as the history of our race along the religious line.

So all the changes wrought in men's ideas by science, history, criticism, right reason, scholarship, and a growing humanity—changes which to many seem only loss, are really so much gain; they take away something but they give us in clearness, in surety, and in hopefulness more than they take away. Much is pulled down, but it is that a fairer building may rise out of the ruins. It is as Oliver Wendell Holmes has sung :—

The waves unbuild the wasting shore
Where mountains towered, the billows sweep,
Yet still their borrowed spoils restore,
And raise new empires from the deep.

So while the floods of thought lay waste
The old domain of chartered creeds,
The heaven-appointed tides will haste
To shape new homes for human needs.

Be ours to mark with hearts unchilled
The change our outworn age deplores;
The legend sinks, but faith shall build
A fairer throne on new-found shores.

The star shall glow in western skies
That shone o'er Bethlehem's hallowed shrine,
And here a fairer temple rise
Than crowned the rock of Palestine.

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